













A  
Two-fold Inheritance.

BY  
GUY BOOTHBY

AUTHOR OF  
'A BID FOR FORTUNE,' 'DOCTOR NIKOLA,' 'THE BEAUTIFUL WHITE DEVIL,'  
ETC.

*ILLUSTRATIONS BY OSCAR WILSON*

LONDON  
WARD, LOCK & CO., LIMITED  
NEW YORK AND MELBOURNE

1903



# Ā TWO-FOLD INHERITANCE

## CHAPTER I

IF, at the time of which I am writing, you had searched the river Thames from Ittle Lock to—shall we say—Richmond Bridge, I doubt very much whether you would have discovered so luxurious a floating home as the houseboat *Love in Idleness*, then lying by Shiplake Ferry. As you looked at it you would probably have argued that it was an ideal craft in which to spend a week-end, and indeed you would not have been wrong. The boat's arrangements came as near perfection as human art and ingenuity could bring them. Then again, as every one who knew her admitted, it would have been impossible to have found a more charming hostess than the beautiful Mrs. Dartrell, the owner of the boat in question. The fact that the late Mr. Dartrell did not happen to have been known to any of the visitors to his wife's river dwelling-

place, did not detract in any way from her popularity. It is true there were rumours in plenty concerning that good lady's spouse, which, if they were true, did not redound to his credit; while if they were false, they were unjustifiable libels on a dead man. One thing at least is quite certain, he must have been fairly well endowed with this world's goods. His widow was to be met everywhere. Or rather since "everywhere" is an elastic term in these unregenerate days, it must be understood that when I use it, I mean at all the principal theatres, restaurants, and places of amusement. Her beautiful face and exquisite figure were conspicuous at Suburban race-meetings; while at Henley it was almost as difficult to obtain a footing on her houseboat as it is to be invited to dine and sleep at Windsor. In addition to the boat in question she was the possessor of a delightful little house in Brook Street, Mayfair, a cottage in the vicinity of Box Hill, and, last but not least, a bungalow in a charming, but little-known seaside village, a little more than a couple of hours' train journey from London.

The exquisite little *Sèvres* clock on the chimney-piece in the drawing-room of the houseboat had just struck midnight when Mrs. Dartrell rose from the card-table, at which she had been playing bridge with Mrs. Bennett, her com-

panion, a stately dame of fifty-five, Sir George Welbrooke, just back from a two years' exploration journey to the *hinterland* of the Victoria Nyanza, and little Gerald Stukeley, of the Foreign Office, a good-hearted busybody, but an indispensable addition to every house-party. After she had risen, Mrs. Dartrell glanced across the room at the other tables, at one of which a charming young lady, distinguished by her hostess with the title of "cousin," and who had lately reached England from the United States, was instructing young Forster Featherstone, of the Guards, in the rudiments of a new Transatlantic amusement, rejoicing in the extraordinary name of *squish-squash*. Her eyes rested longest, however, on the further table at which two men were playing piquet. The man seated in the corner, in the full light of the standard lamp, was the somewhat notorious Colonel Devereux, concerning whom rumour had as many stories to tell as there are days in the year. He was known to every one; he was a member of many clubs, was to be met in all good society, and also in society that was the reverse of good—to put it mildly, equivocal. He was a consummate actor, the possessor of an excellent singing voice, while, as a conjurer, he was almost equal to the best professionals. In their hearts nobody felt inclined to repose much trust in him; at the

same time, however, they would have found it extremely difficult to say why.

The name of his companion, perhaps one should say his adversary, was to be found in Debrett. He was none other than Reginald Fitzwilliam Sandridge, only son of the late Malcolm Sandridge, of Brathborn Hall, in the county of Rutlandshire. The same unimpeachable authority declared him to be the nephew and heir of the seventh Earl of Weldersham. In appearance he was a tall, handsome young fellow of twenty-eight, little given to taking the world seriously, and at the same time quite capable of making the most of all the advantages it had bestowed upon him. Luckily for himself, he was the possessor of one of the most equable temperaments in the world—indeed, “as placid as Reggie Sandridge” had long since become a commonplace among his many friends. Nothing put him out; he was invariably cheerful; always ready for amusement of any sort, from ping-pong to steeple-chasing; a good man across country, and one of the best pigeon-shots that ever pulled trigger at Hurlingham or Monte Carlo.

After a moment's hesitation Mrs. Dartrell crossed the room to the table at which the two men above mentioned were seated.

“Come, come, gentlemen,” she said. “Are

you aware that it is Sunday morning? I think we have had quite enough of cards for to-night."

"Well, perhaps you are right," said Reggie, rising from his chair as he spoke. "You must give me my revenge another time, Devereux." Then as his hostess moved away towards the other table, he added: "Let me see, that makes fifteen hundred I owe you, does it not?"

"That or something near it," answered the Colonel, casually, as if such a large sum were a matter of no importance to him. "I must say you have had deuced hard luck. I don't know that I ever saw cards run so badly!"

Without intending to breathe even the faintest suspicion against the gallant Colonel's play, I cannot refrain from saying that it is strange how many people had had the same remark made to them by him. Then the Colonel passed to the dainty, little inlaid spirit-stand, where he mixed himself a whisky and potash with the air of a man to whom fortune has for once been kind. Reggie meanwhile had followed his hostess towards the door in the stern of the boat. He drew aside the *portière* and stepped with her on to the small gallery. Thence to the deck above was the matter of a few steps. Once there they seated themselves in two comfortable chairs beside the rails. It was a lovely night, soft and fragrant of summer, while the moon was almost at



full. A slight mist lay upon the meadows across the river which hid the view of the woods and distant hills. From another boat, a hundred yards or so further down stream, came the sound of a piano and a woman's voice singing Tosti's "Good-bye." Otherwise the only sounds to break the silence were the voices of Mrs. Dartrell's guests in the cabin below, and the gentle lip-lap of the water against the sides of the house-boat.

Reggie had known Mrs. Dartrell for some considerable time—that is to say, as time is reckoned at this flyaway period of ours, when a man may be one's bosom friend for a week, and be lying in a forgotten grave in the Soudan, or the Australian Bush, a twelvemonth later. For some reason best known to herself that lady had been particularly kind to Reggie. It might be said that most women were. It was also a fact that he admired her in return. A lot of men did that, but somehow they did not advance any further.

"I am afraid you have been losing heavily again to-night," she said with an air of almost motherly concern, when they had been seated for some few minutes.

"Yes, I've been hit hard to-night. I haven't had much luck lately," the young man replied. Then he added with his usual imperturbability :

"However, it doesn't very much matter. I suppose it will all come right in the end."

She shook her head.

"You are terribly reckless," she observed. "Why men should always be so anxious to gamble away their money, I cannot imagine."

Though he might well have done so, Reggie did not remind her that he had seen her play, herself, for by no means moderate stakes, nor did he comment upon the indisputable fact that it was she who had proposed cards that evening. In many cases like this it is wiser to hold one's tongue. On the contrary Reggie took from his pocket his cigarette-case, Mrs. Dartrell's present to him, and having opened it handed it to her. Taking one of the dainty Melâchrios it contained, she lit it from the match he struck for her. Somehow it seemed to Reggie quite in the proper order of things that Mrs. Dartrell should smoke—yet he could not imagine his pretty cousin, Dorothy Maddison, then living at the old home at Weldersham, with a cigarette between her rosy lips.

"How delightful it is here after the rush and the heat of London," said Mrs. Dartrell after a little pause. "The quiet of the river, the murmur of the wind in the trees, and the ghostly fog on the meadows yonder—always makes me think of Tennyson's lines—

Willows whiten, aspens quiver,  
Little breezes dusk and shiver  
Thro' the wave that runs for ever  
By the Island in the river  
Flowing down to Camelot."

I am not in a position, of course, to say whether my reader, whom we will presume for the moment is of the male gender, has ever been placed in a similar position to that then occupied by Reggie Sandridge. If he has he will be able to appreciate something of its danger. If he has not, I would advise him not to try the experiment. A pretty woman, quoting Tennyson on the roof of a houseboat, under a dainty awning, at midday, is dangerous enough. But how much more dangerous is she in the pale moonlight, when everything is still, and there are no gaping Cockney pleasure-parties to stare at one, no puffing launches to distract the attention, and no blundering but good-natured friend, who will persist in obtruding his presence at the one moment of all others when he should have been conspicuous by his absence.

"Oh, the dear old river! How fond I am of it!" said Mrs. Dartrell at last, rising from her chair and going forward to lean upon the rails to look down upon the stream. "What a pity it is one cannot spend all one's life in this way."

"Perpetual moonlight, pretty dresses, Melâ-

chinos, and unlimited Perrier Jouet! It sounds very nice!" Reggie returned.

"You unromantic creature," she said with a laugh. "I'm afraid you haven't an atom of sentiment in your composition."

"Don't be too sure of that," he answered. "So far as sentiment is concerned, I am—the unknown quantity. For all you know I may possess unheard-of possibilities in the sentimental line."

•• "I am sadly afraid not," she replied, shaking her head. "Now-a-days young men take life too easily to have much sentiment. I am afraid you are all growing selfish. May I read you a little lecture? I will then! In the first place you do not dance; you do not care for the society of persons older than yourself. In most cases you have little or no home life. You dine at restaurants, or your clubs, and, worse than all!—if you do not marry from the ranks of the *corps de ballet*—you look upon love and marriage somewhat as you look upon a disagreeable operation, that may possibly have to be gone through some day, but which must be staved off for as long a period as possible?"

"A terrible indictment! I have never heard you talk in this fashion before. Upon my word, you are almost bitter!"

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"I am feeling bitter to-night," she returned. And then added with unusual seriousness—"I am not myself at all."

"~~That~~ mayonnaise was delightful; unhappily, however, delights often bring unhappiness. Had you resisted temptation——"

A shudder swept over her, and she stopped him hurriedly.

• "For pity's sake don't jest. I cannot bear it to-night."

"My dear Mrs. Dartrell," answered Reggie, with a note of concern in his voice, "it distresses me beyond measure to see you unhappy. Is there anything I can do to help you? You know how willingly I would do anything in my power to serve you."

A little sob escaped her and she hid her face in her hands. Some moments elapsed before she answered him.

"I know you would help me if you could," she said, very softly, when she did speak. "*You* have always been kind to me."

Reggie could not for the moment remember that he had ever shown her any very conspicuous kindness. He did not say so, however, for he could see that she stood in need of sympathy, and this he was quite prepared to offer her, and to an unlimited degree.

"You must not let yourself run down like

this," he said. "Won't you tell me your troubles and let me prove myself a friend?"

She obstinately refused, however, to take him into her confidence. Between you and I, my dear reader, I have since entertained the belief that her silence was due to the very good and sufficient reason that she had nothing of importance to confess. Whether you will incline to the same belief, when you have read all I am about to set forth, is another matter.

For upwards of an hour they remained on deck, she occupied in throwing out hints concerning the loneliness and bitterness of her life, and he endeavouring to comfort her to the best of his ability. How it was that the other guests did not come up to interrupt their *tête-à-tête* I cannot say. It is sufficient for our purposes, however, that they did not.

When they returned to the drawing-room, they discovered a merry party grouped about the Colonel, who was making himself amusing in his own inimitable fashion. A quarter of an hour later the company bade each other good-night, and made their ways to their respective cabins. Reggie was the last to shake hands with his hostess. She gave his hand a little squeeze indicative of thanks, and when he looked into her face he saw that her beautiful eyes were suffused with tears.

"Good-night," she murmured very softly, and then added more softly still, "thank you for your goodness to me."

The gentlemen's quarters were situated in the second portion of the boat, the larger section comprising the ladies' cabins, the saloon or dining-room, with the addition of the drawing-room in which they had played cards that evening.

When Reggie reached his state-room, and had taken off his coat, he sat himself down on his bed to think. He knew as well as possible that for some time past, indeed ever since he and Mrs. Dartrell had stayed together at Pollington Hall for the Lincolnshire, that he had been paying more attention to that fascinating widow than was altogether wise. He knew also, by instinct, and for the reason that several of his friends had warned him, that the same fair lady would have no objection to finding a second lord, could she manage to hit upon the right man. He had assured himself repeatedly that he was not in love with her, and that any liking he might have was of a purely platonic order. Yet, as he thought of the events of the evening, the memory of that beautiful face in its trouble, of that slender, graceful figure, the white arms and white throat, was continually present to him, and would not be dispelled. When he fell

asleep he dreamt that she had thrown herself into the river, and that he was drowned in attempting to save her. It appeared to him that he was able to see his own poor, sodden corpse among the weeds, and the sight was not a pleasing one.

"I don't like that sort of dream," he said to himself when he woke. "It savours to me of the uncanny."

Next morning, when he entered the saloon for breakfast, he was quite prepared to discover his hostess still as *distract* as she had been on the previous evening. Much to his surprise he found her in the best of spirits. Not a trace of her last night's trouble remained with her. The morning was spent by the gentlemen in luxurious idleness under the awning on deck; the ladies, however, with becoming propriety had departed in a skiff for church. The afternoon saw them proceeding in a launch down stream past Regatta Island, past Hurley on the one side, and later, picturesque Medmenham on the other; then home again in time for afternoon tea, and that steady influx of visitors who invariably made the houseboat a place of call on Sunday afternoon. To my thinking, a pretty woman never shows herself to more advantage than when pouring out tea. There is a dainty something about that truly feminine occupation



• which is indescribably charming, and I am not romancing when I say that I have seen even a rough Bush carrier's wife—and there is no rougher specimen of the sex than this—appear womanly and gentle when engaged in this delicate operation. How Mrs. Dartrell looked dressed in a white skirt and filmy blouse, her waist encircled by a curious old silver girdle, Reggie's gift by the way, I must leave you to imagine. Towards that young man she adopted a manner that was half affectionate, and yet half timid. He, poor youth, while scarcely knowing what to make of it, accepted it with great complacency. Though he was not aware of it, and would not have believed you, even if you had acquainted him with the fact, he had never been in a more dangerous position. It was destined to become even more perilous later on.

After dinner, which was served at eight o'clock (Mrs. Dartrell's *chef*, by the way, was none other than the famous Hypolyte, so long connected with the Café Luxembourg), they adjourned to the deck. Mrs. Dartrell having complained of a slight headache, it was suggested that a short row upon the river might have the effect of relieving her of it. For a moment it looked as if the American cousin was about to acquiesce in this suggestion and to offer to go with her; she did not do so, however. The

other gentlemen professing themselves quite comfortable where they were, it was left to Reggie to have the honour of accompanying his hostess. He retired to his cabin to make the necessary change in his attire, and when he returned to the lower deck found the skiff in readiness, and Mrs. Dartrell preparing to embark. The boat was pushed off, and Reggie began to pull leisurely up stream. It was a glorious evening, in fact just the evening for a row upon the Thames. His companion at first volunteered to steer, but it was not long before she wearied of the occupation and threw the lines aside.

"This is delightful," she said at last; "but the steady splash of your sculls is making me sleepy. Shall we pull into the reeds and talk?"

Nothing loth, Reggie did as she proposed, and presently the boat found for itself a place in the luxurious growth of rushes which lined the bank, much to the annoyance of a family of water-fowl who vehemently protested against this intrusion of their privacy.

"And to think that to-morrow we shall all be back again in stifling London," said Mrs. Dartrell with a sigh, when they were safely moored. "I know exactly what the house in Brook Street will be like, and how cross I shall be with every one."

"I should not have imagined that it was in

“your nature to be cross with any one,” said Reggie gallantly, selecting a cigarette and lighting it.

“If you cannot imagine that, it’s plain you don’t know me very well,” she answered, leaning forward and clasping her little white hands upon her knees. “I am essentially a person of moods, and my humours depend very much upon the people I am with. If they are nice, then I reflect their niceness, but if we are not quite *en rapport*—you know what I mean—then down my spirits drop to the level of absolute boredom.”

“As you have always been very nice to me, I suppose I may take to myself a small fragment of the compliment,” laughed Reggie.

“You are always kind,” she said, and uttered a little sigh. “I wish every one were like you. I wonder if it has ever struck you that a woman who is left alone in the world has a very hard battle to fight, and that the battle is made even harder, if she happens to have been favoured by nature with even a modicum of good looks.”

“You surely don’t allow yourself to be made miserable by the tittle-tattle of the Town?” cried Reggie, and then in a flash he saw what a mistake he had made.

“Ah!” she said, with quick womanly intuition, “then you have also heard some of the slanderous

things my enemies say about me?" Then, leaning still further forward, she placed her hand upon his knee and looked earnestly into his face. "Mr. Sandridge, you don't believe those stories, do you?"

"On my honour, no!" he answered. "I should be worse than a cad if I believed what folk might say and still professed myself your friend."

"I thank you," she said. "You are very loyal, and I most firmly believe you to be my friend."

"Try me and see," he continued. "I don't fancy you will find me wanting."

She did not answer, and there followed a long silence, during which she plucked at the rushes beside the boat, and seemed to be wrapped in thought. He watched her, noting the slender curve of her throat, and the delicacy of the little hand resting upon his knee.

"Well, never mind my troubles to-night," she cried at last. "I'm a pretty sort of hostess to thrust them upon you in this way. Let us talk of something else. Tell me of your horse. Do you think he will win the Derby?"

"I sincerely hope so," he answered. "When last I heard from Bateson he was doing as well as even *he* could wish. Unfortunately for me, however, the favourite is also doing well."

"Yet I see he went back a point in the yesterday's betting," she observed in the most natural way in the world. "Does that not look as if there was something wrong?"

"I don't think we need attach very much importance to the betting," said Reggie. "If I know anything of the ring he will be firm enough again to-morrow."

"Oh, I do hope you'll win. It will be a triumph. You'll be hopelessly conceited if you do."

"I don't know about that. At any rate, I can promise the Public a good run for their money."

She played with the rushes for a few seconds before she spoke again. When she did there was a note of anxiety in her voice.

"Will it make a great deal of difference to you if he loses?"

Reggie made what was intended to be a wry face.

"It will not be altogether a bed of roses," he replied. "I've backed him to the tune of a good figure."

He did not tell her that his horse's failure would bring him to the verge of ruin. There was no need for him to do so, and experience had taught him that it is seldom wise to inflict one's troubles upon one's friends.

She gave up playing with the rushes and wiped her hands with a tiny lace handkerchief, the faint perfume of which just reached him.

"I wonder, Mr. Sandridge, if I were to ask you to grant me a great favour, whether you would do so?" she said slowly.

"I suppose it would be very ungallant to say that I must know first what the favour is?" he returned. "At the same time I think I can promise you that there is not much I would not do to serve you. What is it?"

"I want you to promise me that, in the event of Knight of Malta not winning, you will come to me, as one friend would do to another, and let me offer a helping hand. It would make me so happy if you would do this."

"It is very good of you," he replied, "and I am really grateful to you for your kindness; but should my horse go down, I think I shall manage to pull through somehow."

"You are not angry with me?" she asked anxiously. "A woman never knows whether she does right or wrong in matters such as this, and I do so want to prove myself a true friend, just as you have been to me."

"You have done so most effectually," he replied. "Even if I do not accept your generous assistance, I shall always remember the kindness that proffered it."

For once in his easy-going life he was genuinely moved. What right had the world to say cruel things against one who could be so loyal to her friends as she had just proved herself to be? Never again, so far as lay in his power, would he permit one slanderous breath to assail her fair fame in his hearing. Should such a thing come to pass he would constitute himself her champion, let the world say what it might. A curious excitement was slowly, but surely, taking possession of him.

"Good gracious!" said the lady at last when she had consulted her watch, "do you know that it is nearly half-past ten? What will they think of me for deserting them for so long?"

"Well, perhaps we *had* better be getting back," said Reggie, almost reluctantly. "Yet it is awfully jolly out here!"

"I have enjoyed it more than I can say," she replied. "But I suppose one must remember one's duties to one's guests."

Reggie felt inclined to express himself forcibly concerning the guests in question, who, he knew, were amusing themselves quite well without them. In obedience to her wishes, however, he took up one of the sculls and pushed the boat into the stream. Then he began to pull slowly towards the houseboat. During the homeward voyage his companion was very silent,



and somehow he, himself, for once, did not feel inclined for conversation. At last they reached their destination. The lights shone from the drawing-room windows; but the sound of voices that reached them from the deck above told them that their friends were enjoying the cool air outside. They pulled up alongside, and Reggie made the painter fast. He helped his companion to disembark, and then paused to see what she wished to do next.

"You deserve to be rewarded for your exertions," she said, with a little laugh. "Come in and I will give you some champagne cup."

Nothing loth he followed her through the drawing-room to the dining-saloon, where a silver bowl was discovered containing that ambrosial fluid. She ladled out a glassful for him, and presented it to him with charming grace. When she had filled one for herself they clinked glasses together and toasted each other. Replacing her glass upon the table, and putting her hand on Reggie's arm, she said almost pleadingly—

"I hope you will forget the silly things I said to you to-night, about people not thinking well of me? I should not have been so foolish as to have mentioned it to you. One's troubles should be kept to oneself."

"I am glad you did speak of it," he answered,



"since it gives me an opportunity in my turn of proving my friendship."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that for the future I shall constitute myself your champion, and woe shall befall the person who dares even to—but there, I will not insult you by supposing that any one could possibly speak ill of you."

"But, Mr. Sandridge, I cannot let you take my part in this way. It would make my position worse than it is at present. Think what people would say."

"It would be better for them if they said nothing," he replied, viciously. "Believe me, I shall find a way of dealing with them."

"But I cannot allow you to do this," she answered. "Every one would question your right to take my trouble upon yourself. Cannot you see that?"

Almost before he knew what he had said, the fatal words had escaped his lips. They were spoken and could never be recalled.

"Will you give me that right then?"

She took a step backwards and felt with her hand for the table behind her. Having found it she leant against it heavily. Reggie noticed that she was trembling violently.

"Do you mean it?" she asked, in a voice but little above a whisper.

"I do," he answered.

Then she tottered forward and he caught her in his arms. What happened during the next five minutes I don't think it would have been possible for Reggie to have told you. He was like a man dazed; and dazed, I fear, not so much by his good fortune, as by the responsibilities of the step he had so suddenly taken. After a little interval Mrs. Dartrell proposed that they should go on deck. He assented, and they accordingly joined the party under the awning. Whether the others had any suspicion of what had occurred it is impossible to say, but the unusual quietness of the absentees should surely have afforded them food for conjecture. At last it was time to retire, and the usual "good-nights" were said. Again Reggie and his hostess were the last to offer each other the customary wish. They were alone together in the drawing-room at the time.

"I cannot believe it yet, Reggie," she said, holding his hands in hers, and looking up at him. "It seems almost too good to be true. *Bon soir, mon prince, dormez bien et rêvez de moi.*"

When he reached his own cabin he followed the procedure of the previous night, and sat down to think.

"I wonder what I've done?" he said to himself, and then repeated the question, "I wonder what I've done?"

How it came about no one was able to tell; the fact, however, remains that when he entered the dining-saloon on the following morning, he immediately became aware that his engagement was already Public Property. Welbrooke, the African explorer, congratulated him bluffly; Forster Featherstone, languidly, as if the matter did not concern him; Little Stukeley, as if it were a stupendous stroke of good fortune, and he envied his friend beyond all living men; while Colonel Devereux played the heavy father, and having bestowed upon them a humorous blessing, vowed that he had never been more genuinely delighted in his life. As my readers may imagine it was a ceremony with which Reggie could very well have dispensed. His *fiancée*, however, womanlike, seemed to derive particular satisfaction from it.

After breakfast the usual breaking-up commenced. Stukeley and Forster Featherstone returned to their duties; Sir George Welbrooke was anxious to get to Town, to pack up his traps, and then start for the north; while Reggie had a variety of engagements that necessitated his hastening back to the Metropolis.

Before leaving he promised his *fiancée* that he would call upon her that evening at Brook Street. She assured him that she should count the minutes until she saw him again.

"I'm afraid people will call us a most devoted couple," she said, her arms encircling his neck. "I'm prepared to spoil you terribly."

That night he was to dine at a certain sporting club, with a man who had only lately returned from India. To while away the time until his friend should put in an appearance, he entered the reading-room and picked up an evening paper. Among the fashionable intelligence he discovered the following—

"A marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Mr. Reginald Sandridge, nephew and heir of the Earl of Weldersham, and Mrs. Dartrell, widow of the late Matthew Dartrell of Brazil."

"By Jove," said Reggie to himself, as he threw the paper down with some little impatience, "they've not been long in letting the world know about it! I wonder what the old gentleman at Weldersham will say?"

He was to find out even sooner than he expected.

## CHAPTER II

ON the afternoon following the announcement of his engagement to the fascinating Mrs. Dartrell, Reggie Sandridge might have been observed (that I believe being the correct expression) driving in his own hansom, up that steep ascent which distinguishes the entrance to the Main Line of Waterloo Station. Had you been there to have seen it you would agree with me in saying that it was a neat turn-out, from the owner's varnished boots to the crown of the groom's carefully-brushed hat; from the horse's brass-mounted harness to the polished panels and rubber tyres of the vehicle itself. As some one once remarked: "If you were to happen upon Reggie Sandridge in the Great Sahara, or the farthest Australian Bush, you'd find him, and every thing connected with him, as spick and span as if he had sprung from a band-box only a minute before." It was not that he bestowed any very particular attention upon the matter of his dress; it was purely

a question of the right things fitting the right man. He was his tailor's favourite customer—not because he paid him his bill more promptly than any one else—but because, as that eminent artist was wont to declare, “Mr. Sandridge looks the perfect gentleman, and does me credit wherever he goes—that's why I like to make for him.” For the effect produced, the tall, lithe figure, and the shapely limbs, were probably responsible, though the handsome face, the curly brown hair, and the small, but carefully-trimmed moustache, may have proved themselves important factors in the net result. Moreover, he was blessed with a charming manner towards all men; was never known to have quarrelled with any one, indeed his most intimate friends all declared that they could not remember ever having seen him out of temper. He looked upon life as life looked upon him, that is to say, with a smiling face, and if, at times, matters did chance to go a little wrong, he would argue that he couldn't expect good luck always, and doubtless they'd soon right themselves, and go on as merrily as before.

When the cab pulled up in the yard he alighted, and with a nod to the groom (for he was not one of those men who foster the idea that it adds to one's importance to ignore servants) passed into the booking-office, and

asked for three first return tickets for Carlsford Junction. Having obtained them, he strolled on to the platform in search of the friends he had arranged to meet there. But though he looked about him he could not discover any trace of them. •

"Never mind," he muttered, "there's plenty of time yet. The train won't be in for another five minutes, and they're sure not to be late." Then as he strolled towards the bookstall, he found himself confronted by a man whose face was evidently well-known to him. "Hullo, Richard!" he remarked, "is it really you? How are you, old fellow? It's ages since last we set eyes on each other."

The person he addressed was his cousin, Richard Victor Sandridge, only son of his father's younger brother. In settling his (Richard's) personal appearance, Nature had scarcely been so partial to him as she had been in his cousin's case. While Reggie was tall Richard was small and almost insignificant. He was the possessor of what by the vulgar would be termed sandy hair—a close-cropped beard and also a moustache of the same colour. He also deemed it necessary to use *pince-nez*, which latter villainous adjuncts lent to his face that somewhat supercilious expression which they not infrequently produce. He was three years older than his

cousin and looked more. This may have been accounted for, though personally I do not think so, by the fact that he had a somewhat chequered 'Varsity career. If the truth must be confessed, Richard Sandridge was not popular. And what was stranger still, no one could say exactly why. At school he had kept himself to himself, and had saved every penny of his pocket-money, thereby earning for himself an unenviable reputation for thrift—at the 'Varsity he had made no friends, and could not boast more than half-a-dozen acquaintances. Wines and card-parties knew him not—the River was without his patronage—he was no athlete—nor was the Union cheered by his voice.

When he left the 'Varsity and was called to the Bar, he obtained chambers in the Temple, where he waited for briefs that never came, meditating meanwhile on the cruel injustice Fate had done him in allowing him to be the son of the youngest son, and thus preventing him from being heir to the Weldersham title and estates. Their ways lying in different directions, he seldom saw his cousin, which was perhaps as well, for when he did the interview invariably caused him pain for hours afterwards. Handsome, careless Reggie had the best of everything, while he had nothing but his profession and a miserable pittance of a few hundred pounds a year.



"I'm as well as ever," he said, in answer to Reggie's inquiry, but in a tone that seemed to suggest the idea that he entertained a grudge against nature for even permitting him to go on existing. "Are you going out of Town?"

"Only as far as Carlsford," Reggie replied. "I'm going to have a look at the horse. If he is fit I will drop you a line if you like, and then you can get something on him. We've only got a week before us, and it's just possible, at the end of that time that you may learn then that one of the family had at last achieved the honour of winning the Derby."

"I hope I may," the other answered, but with no great show of heartiness. "As you know, however, I never bet, nor do I attend race-meetings. A poor beggar such as I am can't afford such luxuries."

"Nonsense," said Reggie, "you're too much of a recluse altogether. You should come out of your shell a bit more, Dick." (It might here be explained that Reggie was the only person in the world who ever addressed the other by that familiar name.) "You're a regular anchorite!"

"Oh, I get along very well in my own quiet way," said Richard. "A man can't be expected to do everything on five hundred a year."

"I should rather think not," said Reggie, and then added with candour, "Five thousand

‘doesn’t do me. However, let’s hope the Knight will pull it off next week, and then I’m hanged if I don’t make you come and dine with me, and we’ll celebrate it as befits the occasion.”

The other shook his head. Such things were not in his line, he declared. He never went anywhere.

At that moment Reggie caught sight of the friends he was expecting. They were coming along the platform towards him.

“Well, good-bye, Dick,” he said, offering the other his hand. “Very glad to have seen you, and I only wish I could do so oftener.”

“Good-bye,” returned Richard. Then recollecting himself in time, he added, “By the way, Reggie, I understand I should congratulate you on your engagement.”

“Thanks very much,” Reggie replied. “So you’ve heard of it too. Dash it, everybody seems to have got hold of the news. And now good-bye again. I’ve some friends waiting for me.”

Richard watched his cousin as he strode off to greet his companions. He saw them enter a first-class carriage which had been reserved for them, and with envy biting at his heart, saw the cigars being lighted, and the happy-go-lucky trio settling themselves down for the two hours’ railway journey. Richard had met both of his cousin’s friends at different times, and was pain-

fully aware that they did not regard him with any great favour. Indeed, a mutual acquaintance, who should have known better, had once been indiscreet enough to repeat a remark made by the young Earl of Dorset (who now curled up in the furthest corner of the carriage) in jest. From that day Richard had never forgiven him. The latter had a good memory for such things.

"And how is the genial cousin this morning?" asked Sir Harry Bracebridge, as he flicked some invisible dust off his neat boots with a daintily monogrammed pocket-handkerchief.

"Very much the same as ever, poor old beggar," Reggie replied. "His face always wears the expression of that of a man who has found his last five-pound note to be a dummy. It must be terrible to have to take life so seriously."

"How on earth you two fellows come to be cousins, is a mystery to me," said Lord Dorset. "You're as unlike each other as two men can well be."

"That's nature adjusting the equilibrium," Reggie replied. "Sometimes I can't help fancying Richard is jealous of me. You see, if I were out of the way, he'd be Weldersham when the old man dies. It's hard luck to be so near a good thing, and yet so far. I'm not quite certain it wouldn't be to the advantage of all parties concerned if he did come into it. He'd

look after the money better than I should do, that's certain."

"Rubbish!" said Bracebridge. "What's money for if it's not to be spent? At least, that is how I look at it! What's the use of thirty thousand a year to a man, if he's only going to live in diggings, and thinks himself ruined if he spends more than ten pounds a week? That's exactly what Richard would do, and what's more, he'd pass half his time trying to find out how he could cut down his expenses. Look at my old Uncle Petre, for instance. You both know him. A lot of pleasure he got out of his money. 'Gad, it hurt him more than having an eye-tooth drawn to have to pay a sovereign away, unless he saw that he was going to get twenty-five shillings for it. And as for lending you a hundred pounds, without gold-edged security, he'd see you at the bottom of the sea first, and then he wouldn't! There's a good story told about him. I don't think I've told it to you. By some deal or another he managed to acquire some property in Australia, and two or three years ago it became necessary for him to go out to inspect it. On the way home he put in a fortnight with Kilfarline, who was then governor of Ceylon. He was going up to India afterwards, and here the joke begins. He had stayed with Kilfarline to save hotel expenses—but it hurt him like the ague

when he remembered that on leaving he would have to tip a host of native servants. He was as rich as Croesus, but that didn't come into his calculations. What do you think the old boy did?"

The others shook their heads. Lord Petre Davenant's methods were beyond them.

"Why, he exchanged his Australian gold, and the proceeds of a lot of Bank of England notes which he had managed to get cashed on board, with the street money-changers, for Indian currency, and tipped the Government House servants with the exchange, which was of course considerably in his favour. So that he still had his money, and his tips cost him nothing. If you can beat that in a hurry I'll allow you to try."

"I'm afraid you are the possessor of a profligate imagination," said Reggie, with a shake of the head.

"You don't believe me?" returned the other. "Do you think any one would dare to jest about old Petre. Why, do you know, at Davenant he'd never have an egg boiled for the breakfast-table until he had made sure that somebody was going to eat it."

While they were thus conversing the train was rolling steadily along through the Wiltshire country, through chalk cuttings and over breezy downs, past old-fashioned farmhouses, and through luscious water-meadows where

the cattle stood knee-deep in grass. At last it pulled up at the little wayside station of Carlsford. Outside the village the downs began again and rolled away until they became merged in the skyline.

When they had given up their tickets the trio passed out in the high road, where a high dog-cart, driven by an elderly gentleman, with a merry red face, and snow-white hair, was awaiting their coming. This was the trainer himself, Mr. Bateson, who, in his desire to show civility to his patron and his friends, had driven over personally to meet them.

"Good-day, sirs," he said, raising his hat politely as he spoke.

"Good-day, Bateson," they replied, for they were all well acquainted with him. Then when Lord Dorset had taken his place in front, and when the others had clambered up behind, they set off on their drive across the downs to the training establishment where the famous Knight of Malta, on whom so much depended, was installed. The road over which they travelled was as fine a thoroughfare as any you would find in England, one of those magnificent Roman highways that seem impervious even to the destructive hand of Time.

"And how's the horse, Bateson?" Reggie inquired, when they were fairly on their way.

"As fit as human hands can make him, sir," the trainer replied. "He does his work as regular as clockwork. To-morrow morning we'll see what we can wind him up to. I don't like to commit myself, but I can't help thinking that this time we shall be as near winning as ever I've been in my life."

"Let's hope so," Reggie answered fervently. "I've got about as much on him as he can carry."

"At any rate he'll give you a good honest run for it," continued Bateson. "If he don't quite get there, it won't be his fault or mine, for that matter!"

"I'm sure of that," Reggie replied.

Presently they began to descend from the downs, and found themselves approaching the famous Burminster Training Establishment, of which Bateson was the proprietor and the presiding genius. His own house, a comfortable stone building, standing in a large shady garden, and approached by a broad carriage drive, was a hundred yards or so distant from the stables.

The old notion of a rough-and-ready trainer's abode, with sporting prints on every wall, horse-shoes over the doors, and the perfumes of the racing stable pervading everything, has long since been exploded. The trainer of to-day is, as a rule, a very different individual to his ancestors of the

thirties. John Bateson made a delightful host. Apart from his business his chief hobby was his garden. Indeed his chrysanthemums were the admiration of the neighbourhood. His wife was a charming lady, whose society was appreciated by high and low alike; while his daughters—the eldest of whom had just said good-bye to Nuneham—were charming girls, worthy of their father and mother. To descend to meaner matters, I might remark that the stables were built upon the most approved models and were capable of accommodating upwards of a hundred horses. Beyond them (the stables) the downs continued, until the eye caught a glimpse of the housetops of the village of Burminster, with the woods of Chaldon forming an effective background.

At the front door they were welcomed by Mrs. Bateson and her daughters. Reggie Sandridge was plainly an established favourite. He did not often pay the training stables a visit, yet, when he did, he invariably received a hearty greeting.

“He’s about the only one of all my clients,” Bateson was wont to observe, “who does not grumble when luck does not go the right way. It’s just, ‘Well, Bateson, it’s a pity we didn’t manage to pull it off that time,’ or ‘Never mind, we must hope to do better next time.’ Never a black look or a growl of disappointment do you get from him. That’s why I am more pleased



to have one of his horses win a small handicap, than I am when I manage to pull off a big event like The Thousand or The Jubilee for any one else."

They dined that evening without ceremony; played a game of billiards afterwards in John's handsome room at the back of the house, after which a long talk followed on past and future events. Then, after a carefully-concocted night-cap had been manipulated, they retired to their respective rooms at an hour which in London they probably would have thought the beginning of the evening.

Early hours prevailed at Burminster. At half-past seven they were called, descended to eat a hearty breakfast, and then mounted the hacks that were provided for them, and rode off with the trainer to the particular spot on the downs where the trial they had come to witness was to take place. It was a lovely morning, and the three young men were in just the humour to enjoy it. His Lordship of Dorset, who was himself on the eve of embarking on a racing career, was a firm believer in his friend's luck, and for that reason took about as much interest in the equine prodigy they were about to see tried, as did his owner. The training grounds of Burminster are as famous as any in England. The man who can wish for anything more beauti-

ful than old sound turf, on a bed of chalk, where a straight course of upwards of three miles can be obtained without difficulty, where the air is as bracing as champagne, and there is no bush, dip, or hollow, in which a tout can hide himself, must indeed be hard to please.

When they reached the appointed spot, they discovered a long string of sheeted thoroughbreds parading under the charge of the head lad. On arriving at a certain white post they brought their hacks to a standstill.

"Now, gentlemen," said Bateson, taking them out of earshot of the lads, "if you will allow me, I will explain to you what I have arranged. As you know, we have a most reliable trial horse in Catseye. I am familiar with his form to an ounce. We've tried him at everything, and, so far as he is concerned, I don't think there is the smallest chance of our making anything like a serious mistake."

"And who are the others?" asked Reggie.

"The Knight, of course—and Wild Violet. The Knight carries eight stone six, Catseye, as a six-year-old, eight stone two, and Wild Violet eight stone twelve. I don't think the handicapping can be much better, and if he can win at that we have every right to feel that he will do us credit at Epsom."

"I hope and trust he may," Reggie replied.

“And now, where are they?” Bateson held up his hand, and in response three of the covered animals aforementioned, accompanied by the head lad on a pony, came towards them. A heap of weight cloths lay on the track near the starting-post, and these Bateson, when he had dismounted, began to overhaul.

The next ten minutes were occupied in adjusting the cloths in question and the important work of saddling, upon which the trainer bestowed the most minute attention. That finished, he said a few words to the head lad, and then gave the signal to the riders of the selected animals to follow him across the down.

“Now, gentlemen,” said the trainer, “if you will be good enough to accompany me, I’ll conduct you to the winning-post. We shall be able to see everything from there, and to draw our own conclusions.”

They accordingly cantered towards another white post, which in its day had seen the fortunes of more than one equine celebrity decided more or less conclusively. They had not long to wait there. Indeed they had scarcely time to produce their race-glasses, and to settle themselves down, before an exclamation from the trainer warned them that the horses had been dispatched on their journey. Wild Violet was the first away, closely followed by the Derby

candidate. At the mile the Knight took up the running; from that moment the issue was never in doubt, and with the chestnut Catseye some three lengths away, he was hailed the winner of a trial that appeared in every way satisfactory.

"Just what I expected, sir," said Bateson, rubbing his hands together. "He's come on wonderfully of late."

"If the trial counts for anything," said Reggie, "he should make it more than hot for them on the downs. At any rate, he's good enough for my money."

"And mine," replied the others.

"It's not my business, of course, sir, to say anything to my employer or his friends, but I can't help wishing that you gentlemen weren't putting your money on him quite so heavily. There are so many 'ifs' in a Derby that there's no knowing what may turn up."

Reggie gave a pleasant laugh.

"Let us pull it off this time," he answered, "and we'll see if we can't reform." Then, drawing the trainer a little on one side, he added, "By the way, you have every confidence in Bassage, I suppose, Bateson?"

"Every confidence," the trainer replied. "What makes you ask the question, sir? Have you anything against him?"

"Nothing very serious," said Reggie, "but I

must confess I've heard one or two rather queer stories about him of late. What is more, I wasn't quite satisfied with the manner he rode The Margrave, at Kempton."

"I don't think you need be afraid, sir," answered Bateson. "There are some people, I know, who are not particularly sweet upon him, but I've had a good deal to do with him and I don't think Bassage would play me false. It would be very much against his interests to do so."

"As long as you're satisfied with him, I am," replied Reggie, and then strolled across to where the horses were being re-clothed.

Knight of Malta was a handsome animal, and as Bracebridge remarked, "a race-horse, every inch of him." Indeed it would have been difficult to find a fault in him, and given the fact that only a few minutes before he had defeated two such well-known performers as Catseye and Wild Violet; that he was trained by one of the cleverest members of the profession; and that he was to be ridden by one of the crack jockeys of the day, it would seem that the enthusiasm of his owner and his owner's friends was likely in a large measure to be justified. So far his career had been an eminently successful one. As a two-year-old he appropriated the July Stakes at Newmarket, and the Middle Park

Plate, while as a three-year-old he had already won the Prince of Wales' Stakes at Leicester, and had only been beaten by a short head for the Two Thousand.

When they had watched the other horses of Bateson's string perform their appointed tasks they once more turned their hacks' heads in the direction of the trainer's residence. The success which had attended the trial had put them in the highest spirits, and when, after a more minute inspection of the stables, they drove to the station, it was with the profound conviction that they were leaving behind them the horse whose victory at Epsom was as assured as such a question could well be.

When Reggie reached Town once more he dispatched a wire to the astute individual who was in the habit of transacting his racing business. He was a quaint little man, resembling a Catholic priest more than anything else; his manner was quiet and unobtrusive to a degree, yet he would have to be a clever individual who, to employ a nautical phrase, "could manage to get to windward" of Bartholomew Belton, Turf Commissioner.

"Good-afternoon, Belton," said Reggie, when the other made his appearance at the flat in Mount Street. "I've been down to see the horse to-day."

"And what do you think of him, sir?" said the other, who had the best of reasons for knowing how heavily his client had backed the animal. "I hope you were well satisfied with him?"

"I couldn't think more of him than I do," said Reggie, and then proceeded to furnish the other with a brief description of the trial.

"That seems satisfactory enough, sir," said the little man. "But if the story leaks out we shall have him made favourite before many hours are over our heads."

"What is his price now?"

"Five to one—favourite, five to two."

"Well, I think on the strength of this morning's work you may put me on another five hundred. One must make hay while the sun shines, you know, and by hook or by crook I've got to get back my Two Thousand money."

The little man made a note in his pocket-book (which, I have no doubt, could have told some curious tales, had it been able to speak), and then taking up his hat bade his client farewell.

As he descended the stairs he shook his head solemnly. "There's not another gentleman," he muttered to himself, "that I'd serve so willingly, but there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip, particularly in racing, and if Knight of Malta don't win next week, I'm afraid it will be the

last bit of business I shall do for Mr. Reginald Sandridge—more's the pity."

In the meantime the owner of the horse was lighting a cigarette, carefully and deliberately. This important work accomplished he took from his pocket his betting-book and settled himself down to some abstruse calculations.

"It will be a precious close shave," he said to himself, "but it looks as if it should come out all right. If it doesn't——" here he paused and tapped his teeth meditatively with the pencil.

It was plain that in the event of such a possibility occurring, he scarcely knew what would happen. There had been a time when the fortune he had inherited from his mother had seemed inexhaustible. The situation wore a very different aspect now.

"Never mind, I must trust to luck," he said as he closed the dainty little morocco volume and replaced it in his pocket.

At that moment the door opened, and his imperturbable servant entered the room with a telegram upon a salver. Reggie tore open the envelope and withdrew the contents. The message ran as follows—

"UNCLE ill, desires to see you—come at once.

"DOROTHY."

In his younger days Reggie's uncle, the Earl



of Weldersham, mentioned in the telegram, had been known, not only to his intimates, but to the world at large, partly by reason of his powerful physique, but also by reason of his extraordinary vitality as "Cast Iron Weldersham." Even at the advanced age of eighty-two the name was by no means inapplicable. For this reason Reggie found it difficult to realize that he was sufficiently ill to necessitate the summoning of his heir.

"Pack my bag at once," he said, turning to the man who was waiting to discover whether there was an answer to the telegram. "But first look me out a train. I am going down to Weldersham this afternoon."

Half-an-hour later he was bowling along in an express towards the old home of his family, the home of which he had every right to believe that some day he would be the lord.

### CHAPTER III

I CAN well remember the first time that I set eyes on Weldersham Castle. I was on a cycling tour, and it was in the height of summer and towards eight o'clock on a very still evening. The country roads were inches deep in dust, the early harvest was being gathered, and more than once I was compelled to seek the safety of the ditch in order to avoid the enormous loaded wagons that were slowly wending their way towards the Home Farm. When, however, I reached the South Lodge and entered the Home Park everything was changed. In the course of my life I have had the good fortune to inspect a very fair portion of the stately homes of England, but I cannot recall one that for picturesque beauty can in any way come up to the scene that was now presented to my gaze. It was beautiful beyond compare. Having passed through a small plantation of young larches, in which the tender green harmonized delightfully with the luscious grass, I found myself standing

upon an old stone bridge, spanning a respectable stream, with one of the fairest scenes in all England spread out before me. To my left was a noble expanse of park, and on the extreme of which the woodlands rose towards the evening star. To my right, a hundred yards or so distant and flanked by the river, was the castle, a magnificent pile, a building, in fact, that once seen, as I saw it then, would remain in the memory for ever. With the warm glow of sunset upon it, it was a picture that a Turner would have loved to paint. Tower rose upon tower, buttress upon buttress, wing succeeding wing, while on the right the quiet old river stole always onwards on its stately journey to the sea. Broad walks, incomparable lawns and rare statues graced the garden, but it was the dignity of the building and the marvellous setting, the river, the woodlands, and the general air of stately peace that appealed to me more than anything else. For upwards of half-an-hour I stood on the bridge gazing at the scene, little dreaming how intimately I was to be associated with it in years to come. Then remounting my bicycle, I continued my journey, passed out through the north gate, and in less than half-an-hour was well on my way to the Minster town.

It was late in the afternoon when Reggie

Sandridge alighted from the train at the little wayside station most convenient for Weldersham. He was recognized by the station master as he surrendered his ticket at the gate. The latter touched his hat respectfully.

"Begging your pardon, but I hope all's going well with the horse, sir?" he said. "We're on him, almost to a man, in the neighbourhood."

"I am sure he'll do his best for you," said Reggie. "By the way, have you heard how my uncle is?"

"Very weak indeed, I'm afraid, sir," the station master replied. "We heard this morning that his condition was as bad as bad could be."

Reggie passed out to the carriage that was awaiting him in the station yard, and took his place in it. He had known the coachman and the carriage groom all his life, consequently he looked upon them in the light of old friends.

From the station to the castle was a distance of something like three miles, yet every inch of it was fraught with memories for Reggie. He could recall at one point the battle he had had with a pony which had obstinately refused to jump a ditch, and had ended the combat by pitching him head-foremost into it. Further on he remembered his meeting with the gipsy, who had crossed his hand with silver and prophesied for him a life of unexampled prosperity—which he

had taken in those days to mean the acquirement of a certain brindle bulldog, upon which his affections had been set throughout his holidays. As I have said the whole neighbourhood was filled with associations for him, and as he recognized each familiar landmark he experienced a little twinge of conscience, as he reflected that in the last few years he had never given it a visit.

"I am not sure, after all," he said to himself, "that a country life is not better than that of the town. What duffers we fellows are to live as we do. Turning night into day—week in, week out, and never thinking of the reckoning that will have to be paid some day." Then, thinking of the old man who was so ill, and whom he had hastened down to see, he added, "I suppose I might have done something to have made him care for me a little more. And yet we've not been such bad friends, after all. Though he will not own it, I fancy the old boy has a soft spot in his heart for me."

At last he entered the park, drove for upwards of two miles through what I have already declared to be one of the noblest landscapes in England, crossed the bridge which I have also described, and then by a wonderful sweep approached the great front door of the castle. As he did so, the clock in the stable turret struck

six. He descended from the carriage and entered the wonderful old hall, decorated with the armour of his ancestors, and the scene of many an historic pageant, as its history so quaintly set forth will show.

"How is my uncle, Somes?" he inquired of the ancient butler, who had been five-and-thirty years in his uncle's service.

"I am glad to be able to say that he has rallied a little, Mr. Reginald," the old man replied. "When Miss Dorothy sent off the telegram to you, he was very queer indeed. The doctor has just gone, and is coming again at ten."

"And where is Mrs. Maddison?"

"In the blue drawing-room, sir. Will you be so good as to follow me?"

Reggie accompanied the man to the room in question. As he entered two ladies rose to greet him. The elder was very sweet-looking, with grey hair, and possibly fifty years of age. Her companion, who was her daughter, Dorothy, was a beautiful girl of twenty, with a healthy, straightforward manner, and a predilection for speaking her mind that not unfrequently brought her to the verge of trouble. No one, however, could be angry with Dorothy for very long. Mrs. Maddison was a niece of Lord Weldersham's. Her husband had once managed

the noble Earl's estates in a leisurely and gentlemanly way, and after his death she had accepted the other's offer, and had taken up her abode at the castle with her infant daughter. An arrangement which suited both parties, as it provided Mrs. Maddison with a home for herself and child, and furnished her cousin with a hostess who could receive and entertain his lady guests when they visited the castle.

"I am glad you have come," said the elder lady, as she shook hands with Reggie. "He has been asking for you."

"I hope it is nothing serious?" Reggie replied.

"I am afraid it is very serious," she answered. "Doctor Brownlow did not give us at all a good account of him this morning. This afternoon, however, he seems to be better. If you will let me I will go up and tell him of your arrival."

She left the room, and Dorothy and Reggie were alone together.

"Pray, are you aware?" said the latter, "that it is eight months since I last saw you?"

"It is your own fault for not coming down oftener," replied the young lady candidly. "There was a time when you seemed to think the shooting and hunting worth the train journey. You appear to have changed your mind of late."

They made a handsome couple as they stood together before the fire-place. He was a typical young Englishman, while she was as beautiful a girl as one would be likely to find in a long day's march. What was better, perhaps, she was honesty and sincerity itself, as courteous to her uncle's farm-labourers as she would be to a prince of the blood royal—thought no trouble too great for the sake of one she liked, and in consequence was adored by every one, from the stern old Earl himself down to the humblest ploughboy upon the estate. For Reggie, her cousin many times removed, she had always entertained a profound admiration since the days when as a small boy in an Eton jacket he had given her her first fishing lesson in the river below the castle wall. She had watched his career with the deepest interest, and it must be admitted, since a historian should be candid, with no small amount of disappointment. She had hoped that he would have entered the Army, as he had one time expressed a wish to do, but he had not done it. It was suggested that he should turn his attention to politics, for which his father had had considerable talent, but this also came to nothing.

"People call me lazy," he had once remarked to a friend who had expostulated with him, "because I don't go in for soldiering or pin my



faith on something definite. It only shows how little they know of things. They don't realize how hard I have to work. Consider for a moment! In the summer there's the season, when I'm kept hard at it day after day, then there are receptions and dances to be attended every night, to say nothing of dinner, picture exhibitions, horse shows, polo, and the theatres. In the autumn and winter, without any rest, mark you, there is the shooting and the hunting and the fishing, all of which have to be crammed somehow into a few months. Supposing there weren't men like myself to do it, how would the country get along? What about your trainers, gamekeepers, farmers, horse-dealers and hunt servants? How would they live if it weren't for men who work hard like myself? Don't talk nonsense, dear boy, about my idleness."

After that his friend gave him up as incorrigible.

After a few minutes' absence Mrs. Maddison returned with the information that the old gentleman would be pleased to see his nephew if he would go up to his room.

"You know the room, of course?" she said.

Reggie was only too well acquainted with it. On many occasions as a boy he had been summoned to it to be cross-examined by his stern old uncle concerning some juvenile scrape, or to

be tipped prior to his return to school. He accordingly ascended the massive flight of stairs, and made his way towards a door at the further end of the long gallery, to which they conducted him. On this door he tapped, whereupon it was opened to him by a nurse, who bowed and invited him to enter. It was a handsome room, and in many respects characteristic of the man who had occupied it for fully half a century. The furniture was massive and sombre, the pictures few but distinctly good, while from the window a view was to be obtained as fair as any to be discovered in all England.

Reggie crossed to the bed and greeted his aged relative. It did not need very much discernment to tell that the latter's race was well-nigh run.

"I'm sorry to find you so poorly, sir," Reggie began. "I would have come down sooner, had I had any idea of it."

The old man pointed to a chair by the bedside.

"I thank you," he said, with all the politeness of the old school. "Be so good as to sit down there. I want to talk to you."

Reggie did as he was ordered.

"I sent for you in order that I might have a conversation with you while I have time to express myself as I should wish."

"I hope I shall always be glad to hear what you have to say to me, sir," said Reggie politely, not, however, without a little qualm as to what was coming.

"I shall be glad if you can tell me that later," said Lord Weldersham. "In the meantime permit me to state that certain information has reached my ears which has by no means pleased me."

"I am sorry for that," said Reggie. "Would you mind telling me what the information is?"

"While I regret it I have no objection to doing so," the other replied. "I am credibly informed that you have engaged yourself to marry a lady who has for some time been connected with the theatrical profession, and whose beauty I understand"—here the cynical old lips curled disdainfully—"is her most conspicuous dower. If this is a mere *canard*, pray forgive me!"

Before he replied, Reggie looked out of the window. One of the under-keepers was crossing the bridge, carrying his little three-year-old son upon his shoulder. He remembered having had many happy days rabbiting with that young keeper when the other was little more than a lad.

"In this particular instance," he said, "it would seem that rumour has only lied in the

matter of the theatrical profession. Mrs. Dartfell, who has consented to be my wife, has nothing to do with the stage."

"I offer you my congratulations on that score at least," the other replied. "While we are upon the subject let us remark that her future promises to be a prosperous one. I am informed that you lost five thousand pounds in three nights at her house. Possibly she may help you to win it again—a most equitable arrangement. May I inquire what your debts amount to?"

Still Reggie's good-humour was by no means ruffled.

"It seems scarcely fair to trouble you, sir, with such an unimportant matter. They can be settled by and by."

"It is more important than you imagine," replied his lordship. "I cannot suppose that you have forgotten your destiny as the eighth Earl of Weldersham?"

"You will do me the justice, I hope, to admit that you don't think I mean that!"

"That is beside the question," said his uncle. "What I want to understand is your position with regard to this—this Mrs. Dartrell. I will not disguise the fact that it has caused me some little anxiety."

A little flush came into Reggie's face. He

would have found some difficulty in explaining why.

"I have asked Mrs. Dartrell to marry me," he said simply, as if that were sufficient to explain everything.

"And having done so, you mean to adhere to it?"

"One does not usually ask such a question without they intend to hold by it," his nephew answered.

"Forgive me if I do not mince matters," said his lordship, with an impatient movement of his withered right hand on the coverlet. "We Weldershams have, as a rule, been fairly particular in our alliances. In point of fact I cannot recall another instance like the present. You must forgive me if I say that it pains me to picture Mrs. Dartrell as the *châtelaine* of this house. Unfortunately, as you know, I am not in a position to prevent it. That is the curse of our system of entail—heir you are, and heir you must remain."

"I am sorry the fact should cause you pain," said Reggie.

"There is no way of withdrawing from the position, I suppose?"

"None whatever! You must surely see that, sir!"

A lengthy silence ensued, during which the

face of the old man seemed to grow every moment harder. On the second finger of his right hand he wore a curious ring which was fashioned into the shape of two serpents coiling round each other. The eyes of the reptiles were composed of rubies, and it seemed to Reggie that they were winking and blinking at him in malicious triumph.

"It is very unfortunate that this should have happened just now," said his lordship at last. "I should have taken it as a favour to myself had you been either able to have broken off the alliance, or to have postponed it until I was beyond hearing anything about it. I am given to understand that your position is hopeless unless your horse wins the Derby. Should that not happen, what do you propose doing?"

For the first time during the interview Reggie's mouth hardened.

"I am afraid this must be an exceedingly unpleasant interview for both of us," he said. "Do you think it is worth while prolonging it?"

"Probably not!" said his uncle. "If you are determined in your opposition, I can scarcely hope to be successful in moving you. I might, however, mention the fact that Margetson will be here within the next hour, and that our discussion now will make some difference to what I shall have to say to him. You are of course

aware that so far as the title, this estate, and the house in London, Berham, and Fieldham are concerned, you will succeed. My private fortune, however, is my own to leave. It amounts, I may tell you, to something like thirty thousand pounds a year. It would seem a pity to let such a sum pass one, don't you think so?"

Reggie rose and walked to the window. The under-keeper and his child were disappearing into the wood on the other side of the park. When they vanished he turned once more and walked towards the bed. The old man's keen grey eyes were fixed upon him.

"I must ask you to believe, sir," said Reggie, "that it grieves me more than I can say to have to disagree with you, particularly at such a time and upon such a subject. You must see for yourself, however, that I am not in a position to act otherwise than I am doing."

"Your mind being made up, pray say no more about it," said the old man. "And now, if you will excuse me, I will ask you to leave me. You will stay the night, of course?"

"I should like to do so," said Reggie, and then left the room. "It seems to me I am in an unenviable sort of position," he said to himself as he descended the stairs. "If all his money is to go elsewhere, and the Knight should not win, I shall be done for, lock, stock, and barrel. Never

mind, what's done is done, and if I am any judge of character, he'll not relent, so it's no use crying over spilt milk."

When he entered the drawing-room once more both ladies looked up at him nervously. They had an idea that there was trouble in the wind.

"Won't you come for a stroll, Dorothy?" he said, addressing the younger. "It's a beautiful evening, and the dressing-gong won't sound for another hour."

She willingly complied, and together they passed out on to the terrace, and sauntered slowly along it beside their old friend the river. The sun had dropped behind the woods, and the rooks were cawing drowsily in the elms preparatory to retiring for the night. After proceeding a short distance they halted and stood leaning on the balustrading, looking down at the water, in which the picture of the castle was reflected as clearly as if in a mirror. Dorothy knew that her companion was troubled about something, and she could hazard a very good guess as to what that something was.

"As my uncle knows all about it, I suppose you also have been told of my engagement to Mrs. Dartrell," said Reggie, after a few moments' pause. "You have not congratulated me!"

The girl looked a little embarrassed.

"I do not know Mrs. Dartrell," she faltered;



"but you know I hope that you will be very happy." Then she added, "I trust uncle was not very angry with you?"

"You ought to know him by this time," Reggie replied. He was politeness itself. Nevertheless, if I persist in marrying Mrs. Dartrell his money is to go elsewhere."

"Oh, Reggie, that is terrible," cried the girl. "I am so very, very sorry."

"It's not a cheerful look-out, is it? But it can't be helped. It merely means that I shall be an extremely poor peer instead of a fairly rich one."

He took a cigarette from his case and lighted it. He was certainly a philosophical young man, and even the loss of an income of thirty thousand a year was not sufficient to upset his balance for long. He could not help wondering, however, what his *fiancée* would say when she heard the news. Then he glanced at the girl beside him. Dorothy had always been to him more like a sister than a cousin. He had told her his secrets, teased her, romped with her, but he was not aware then that he had ever been in love with her. That night, however, as he stood beside her, matters seemed different somehow. She was really a very pretty girl, and for some reason he found himself almost unconsciously contrasting her with Mrs. Dartrell, and if the truth must be

told, not altogether to the latter's advantage. One was essentially a woman of the world; the other was a country maid, innocent of the petty *chicaneries* of the world, and looking upon life with calm and unsophisticated eyes. She laid her little hand upon his arm.

"Reggie," she said, "I am so sorry uncle has done this. I wish I could help you."

"I know you would, if you could, Dot," he answered, giving her the old familiar nickname, "but I fear it is impossible. I must pull it through somehow myself."

There was another short pause, and then she continued timidly—

"You won't be angry with me, Reggie, will you, if I say something? It is about something I overheard at the Queckett's garden-party. It was not meant to reach my ears. Young George Queckett, you remember him, I think, was talking to a gentleman from London, a Mr. Vandeleur."

"And what had the gentleman from London to say about me?"

"He said that you had lost all your money, and that if Knight of Malta does not win the Derby you will be ruined."

She stopped here and looked anxiously at him.

"I am afraid he was not very far from the

truth," Reggie replied. "I've been an awful ass, Dot, and I suppose, like every other ass, I must pay the penalty of my folly. But who's this?"

A carriage was approaching them from the direction of the south lodge. When it reached the bridge they were able to see that it contained an elderly gentleman with a clean-shaven rosy face and snow-white hair.

"It's Mr. Margetson," said Dorothy. "I know that uncle sent for him."

The old solicitor alighted from the carriage and lifted his hat to the young lady he saw before him.

"How do you do, Miss Dorothy?" he said. "But there, I needn't ask, your face is my answer, and a very good one too. Good-afternoon, Mr. Reginald, I trust his lordship is no worse?"

"On the contrary, they seem to think he is a little better," Reggie replied. "I saw him half-an-hour ago."

They strolled along the terrace in the direction of the house, and presently the lawyer was summoned to the sick man's chamber. In something less than half-an-hour he returned with a grave face.

"Might I have a few words with you, Mr. Reginald?" he asked.

"Why not? Let us come into the billiard-room. We shall not be disturbed there."

"The billiard-room, by all means," said the other, and followed his companion to the room in question. "I understand that you are aware of the reason of my presence here this afternoon?" he began when they had closed the door.

"My uncle informed me that he had sent for you," Reggie replied, "and though he did not say so in so many words, I gathered that it was with the intention of altering his will."

The lawyer nodded.

"That was certainly the reason," he answered. "And I might add that, under certain contingencies, the alteration is not in your favour."

"Are you at liberty to go into details?"

"Perfectly! I understand that you contemplate marriage with a lady named Dartrell?"

"That is so!" said Reggie. "Go on!"

"I have not, of course, the pleasure of the lady's acquaintance, but it would appear that for some reason, what I cannot say, that the union is not, forgive my plain speaking, altogether agreeable to your uncle?"

"So he led me to believe," said Reggie brusquely. "He informed me that I must choose between the lady in question and his private wealth. Is that so?"

"I regret very much having to announce to you the fact that it is," said the lawyer. "I have been instructed to draw up the will in such a way that, should you wed the lady in question, the money shall pass in certain proportions to your cousin Richard, to Mrs. Maddison and her daughter, and to certain specified charities. I cannot tell you how much I regret this. I am sure you will believe me when I say that I did my utmost to dissuade him from such a step."

"It was kind of you, but I am afraid after all these years, you have not properly gauged the character of 'Cast Iron Weldersham.'"

"I am aware that his lordship is the possessor of a singularly strong personality," said Margetson. "When his mind is made up it is difficult to shake it."

"Well, as the matter is now definitely settled, it is no use, I suppose, for me to worry myself further about it?"

"But, my dear Mr. Reginald, have you reflected what this may mean to you? As the heir to the Earldom of Weldersham, it will be necessary for you to keep up Weldersham Castle. But has it struck you that it is an expensive place to maintain, and that the rent roll, so far as the farms that would pass to you are concerned, would be barely sufficient to meet half

the expenses? It would be impossible for you to live here and to keep up the town house, to say nothing of the other properties connected with the title, unless you had an income of at least twenty thousand pounds a year. I presume you have thought of that?"

"On the contrary, I have never thought about it at all; and it would not appear to be much use my doing so now. By the way, Margetson, I presume you have heard the rumours which are afloat concerning my financial position?"

The lawyer coughed apologetically.

"I am prepared to admit that I have heard certain rumours," he said. "In point of fact they added to the sorrow I have felt in being summoned here to-day. I and mine have served your family for generations, and it goes without saying that I should wish to serve you. What, however, can I do? If only you would permit me to ask you one straightforward question, without being offended at my presumption, it would ease my mind a great deal."

"Ask whatever question you like, my dear Margetson," said Reggie. "We are old enough friends to enable me to feel sure that you mean well by me."

"I am glad you look upon it in that light," said the old man. "I *do* mean well by you,

and I am more than anxious to prove it." He paused for a moment as if in hesitation. "Mr. Reginald," he continued, "I have not the pleasure of Mrs. Dartrell's acquaintance, but though I am only a country solicitor I have heard rumours concerning her. I——"

"One moment, Margetson. Remember, the lady in question is about to become my wife."

"In that case my lips are sealed. Dear, dear, how sadly the world runs."

Reggie felt for the moment that it was scarcely a complimentary speech. He did not comment upon it, however. He knew that Margetson meant him well, while at the back of his own brain there was an uneasy feeling that the other was not altogether in the wrong. Somehow in London, and on the river, Stella had seemed to fit into the picture; here, however, in the old house, where all was so suggestive of the stately Past, the remembrance of whispered *bons mots*, often more daring than discreet, of the beautiful bare arms, the scent of innumerable cigarettes was almost distasteful to him.

Margetson rose from his chair.

"I must be going," he said.

"Will you not stay to dinner?" Reggie inquired, more for the sake of saying something

than any desire he entertained for the old lawyer's company.

"I thank you, no," the other replied. "I have important business which must be attended to to-night before I sleep."

Reggie smiled. He thought he could guess what that business was. Accordingly he accompanied him to the front door, where his carriage was awaiting him. After they had shaken hands upon the steps the old gentleman entered the vehicle. When he had seen it roll away down the drive, Reggie went up to dress for dinner. As may be supposed he was in by no means good spirits. His championship of Mrs. Dartrell had so far done him more harm than good.

Dinner, that evening, was a very quiet meal. Reggie endeavoured to make himself amusing, but the attempt was a dire failure. Mrs. Maddison was naturally of a quiet disposition, while even Dorothy, generally so talkative, was for some reason or another, more silent than usual. When the meal came to an end they adjourned to the drawing-room, where Reggie and the elder lady played a game of *besique* together, while Dorothy at the piano wandered from Chopin to Mozart, and from Beethoven to Paderewski.

At ten o'clock the doctor arrived, and after a careful examination of his patient, was able to announce that an improvement had commenced.



"It looks as if disinheriting me," said Reggie to himself, as he heard the news, "has done him good. For all we know to the contrary it may set him on his feet again."

Next morning the improvement was still maintained, and there was no longer any reason for Reggie to remain at the castle. Before leaving, however, he inquired whether it would be possible for him to have another interview with his uncle, and upon being informed that it was, he went up-stairs to the old man's room.

"Good-morning, sir," he said, on entering the apartment. "I am glad indeed to hear that you are better."

"I thank you," said the invalid. "I understand that you are about to leave for Town?"

"I am going up by the midday train," Reggie replied. "If I can be of any service to you, however, I will remain."

"You are very good. I will not detain you, however. You have doubtless many social duties to which it is necessary that you should give your attention. Forgive my broaching a painful subject once more, but may I ask when your marriage is to take place?"

"Nothing has been settled on that point yet," the other answered.

"I presume it will in a large measure depend

upon the success your horse achieves next week?"

"In a *very* large measure I fancy it will," said the young man.

"You saw Margetson last night?"

"I did!"

"And he reassured you as to my determination?"

"He did!"

"You are aware that I never change my mind?"

"I am quite aware of it!"

"Then let me wish you good-bye. I cannot express a hope that your horse may be successful. Under other circumstances no one would have hailed your victory with more delight than myself."

"I can quite believe that, sir," Reggie answered. "And now let me bid you good-bye. I promised before I came up that I would not let you talk too much. In conclusion I can only say that, apart from the question of the money you at one time contemplated leaving me, I shall always feel grateful to you for the kindness you have shown towards me."

For a moment the old man gazed at his nephew with what was almost an expression of affection upon his face. They shook hands in silence, however, and then Reggie crossed the

room to the door. As he turned the handle he heard a heavy sigh come from the bed.

When he reached the hall once more, he found the dogcart already at the door. He had made his farewell to Mrs. Maddison in the corridor outside his uncle's room. Dorothy, however, was waiting to say good-bye to him at the foot of the grand staircase. She made a pretty womanly picture, in her white summer dress, against the background of old oak and armour.

"Good-bye, Reggie," she said, holding out her hand to him. "If we don't see you again before the great race, I will wish you good luck now."

"Thank you, Dot," he said. "With your good wishes behind him the Knight should surely win."

They walked together to the door, where he mounted to the box of the dogcart, and a few moments later was bowling down the drive. As he crossed the bridge he looked round to see the figure of the girl still standing at the door watching him. She waved her handkerchief and then disappeared. Why he should have done so I cannot say, but it is certain that as he noticed it, he followed his uncle's example and heaved a heavy sigh.

During the journey up to town he endeavoured to interest himself in his papers, but without

success. The memory of a certain pretty face, and a pair of honest blue eyes, continually interposed themselves between him and the columns. Strange to say, that face was *not* the face of Mrs. Dartrell!

## CHAPTER IV

ONLY three days then remained before the running of the race that was to mean so much to Reggie Sandridge and his friends.

An animal named Carrickfergus, winner of the Two Thousand Guineas, was the first favourite, though Knight of Malta ran him very close in the betting; an animal named Whissendine had suddenly come to be regarded as a most useful competitor; while it was said in the North that Pride of the Pit would certainly render a very good account of himself.

The betting was as follows—

5 — 3	against Carrickfergus.
5 — 2	„ Knight of Malta.
7 — 1	„ Whissendine.
10 — 1	„ Pride of the Pit.

A letter from Bateson informed Reggie that his horse was as fit as possible, and doing his work with a whole-heartedness that spoke well for his chance in the impending struggle.

From Weldersham came the news that his uncle was steadily regaining strength. It is only just to Reggie to state that he was unfeignedly glad to hear this intelligence.

"Why should I bear him any malice?" he asked himself. "He has his old-fashioned notions, and if he doesn't approve of my marriage that's his affair and not mine." A moment later, however, he shook his head. "Yes, I'm afraid it's very likely to be more my affair than any one else's," he continued. "If the Knight doesn't win I shall be in rather a curious position."

That afternoon he met Stella by appointment, and they rode together in the Park. It was destined to be an eventful ride. Already Reggie had noticed that his engagement had changed the demeanour of his friends, or rather, his so-called friends, towards himself. Pretty women, who only a few days before had been anxious to attract his attention, now found occasion to look another way as he approached. Charming girls, who had hitherto been only too glad to have him for their cavalier, now bestowed upon him an off-hand bow, as much as to say, "we knew you once, but since you have preferred that creature to us, we have no desire to continue the acquaintance." It was not Reggie's intention, however, to let them see that he was in the least

chagrined by their behaviour. He was Stella's champion, and he would be loyal to her at all hazards. What did it matter to him what the Social World thought of him? He had made his choice and would abide by it. He glanced at his companion. She certainly did not appear to be overawed. At last they came to a part of the road which was apparently deserted. They set their horses at a brisk canter, and when they pulled up, Stella's face had suddenly become serious.

"Reggie," she began, "you surely must see by this time how these women hate me. Don't you think I noticed how they stared—and how they whispered as we passed. They were saying to each other, 'There goes Reggie Sandridge with the woman who is destined to work his ruin.'"

"My dear Stella," Reggie replied, "you must not take so much notice of people's behaviour. You are a great deal too sensitive."

"You would be the same if you were in my position," she retorted. "Think what I have at stake. Your love and all the happiness of my life. They would take it from me if they dared. But I defy them—I defy them all!"

"But why should you always believe that people are so bitter against you?" he inquired.

"Because I am convinced of it," she replied.

"And, believe me, they will be even more so now that they know that I am to marry you. Before they only disliked me because I happen to be pretty, and also because I attracted the men; later they will hate me because I am the wife of Reggie Sandridge—the future Earl of Weldersham. You are a great match! Surely you must know that?"

There was a certain something, he knew not what, that grated upon Reggie's ear. Was it possible, he asked himself, that Stella was taking him merely for his rank?

"How do you know that I am a great match?" he inquired.

"For the reason that you are," she answered. "At least I have always heard so! Not that I mind, one way or the other. Don't think that. I should love you just the same, if you were a shopman or a ploughboy!"

He was silent for a few moments. Then he continued—

"Stella, there was one thing I meant to have told you when I came back from Weldersham."

She looked nervously up at him. Her experience of life had taught her that secrets mean trouble for some one. Therefore she was suspicious of them.

"What is it you have to say to me?" she inquired.



"You know, when I went down to Weldersham the other day, I did so for the reason that my uncle was ill and desired to see me."

She nodded, and stroked the mane of her horse with her crop.

"Well, it appears that he has been rather put out at the way I am going on lately. He said nasty things—and—well, the long and the short of it is, that he has disinherited me. Of course, I shall have the title and the Weldersham entailed estates, but all his private property—without which the other cannot be kept going—will be left to some one else."

While he had been speaking Stella's face had suddenly become ashen pale, and she seemed to be struggling for breath. When she spoke again Reggie scarcely recognized her voice, so changed was it.

"I think I understand," she remarked. "He has done this because he has heard of your engagement to me. He does not approve of it, and he is showing it by taking his money from you. I defy you to deny it."

Reggie thus found himself in a serious fix. It seemed too cruel to admit to Stella that she had guessed correctly, yet he did not see what other reply he was to give her.

"Your face tells me that my surmise is correct," she went on. "Your uncle has willed

his private fortune from you for the reason that he disapproves of me. In this you have another example of the world's opinion. Oh! it is too cruel to be borne! From the manner in which they treat me I might be the vilest woman in London! And what did you say to him?"

"I told him that he must do as he thought best. I gave him to understand that I had made my decision and intended to abide by it." •

"Reggie," cried Stella, turning on him, "that was noble of you. It was the answer of my champion, and, as I live, you shall never regret it. Let him leave his money to whom he pleases, we will manage to get on without it. I will show them all the sort of wife I can be to you, and when I am triumphant, I will take my revenge on them. But we have said enough on this most unpleasant topic—let us now have a canter!"

They did so, and after a sharp gallop, left the Park by Grosvenor Gate, and made their way towards Piccadilly. On reaching Stella's house they called a halt, and Reggie assisted her to alight—much to the interest of the young ladies of the opposite house, who were of course aware of his engagement to Stella, but who had not before seen the lovers together. •

"If you can't come to dinner to-night, won't you drop in later?" Stella inquired, as she stood

beside him on the pavement tapping her neat little riding-boot with her whip.

"I fear it will be impossible," Reggie answered. "As you know, I have a long-standing engagement to dine in Eaton Square to-night. If I can manage to get away early, however, I'll be sure to come round."

"On the chance of seeing you then, *au revoir!*"

Reggie bade her good-bye, and, after handing her horse to the groom who was in waiting, mounted his own hack and rode slowly off to his chambers in Mount Street.

The dinner in Eaton Square was a stately function of the old style, and that is all that can be said of it. Reggie found it exceedingly dull, and would have given much to have been able to get away, but as his host and hostess were old friends, he could not leave as early as he hoped to be able to do. In point of fact it was nearly eleven o'clock when he left the house.

When the door had been closed upon him, he stood for some seconds on the pavement, wondering whether he should go to Brook Street or not.

"Perhaps it would be as well for me to look in," he said to himself. "I promised that I would if I could."

So saying he stepped into a passing cab and bade the man drive him to Stella's house. Upon

his arrival there he was informed that Mrs. Dartrell was at home, and was invited by the young butler to follow him up-stairs to the drawing-room. As they ascended the stairs the sound of singing reached them. The male voice was that of Colonel Devereux—Stella's was the other. The song was from the *Geisha*, and I believe deals with instructions in the art of kissing.

Upon their reaching the drawing-room the butler softly opened the door, and Reggie entered without attracting the attention of the performers. To his surprise, neither the widow's companion, Mrs. Bennett, nor her American cousin, were in the room.

Seating himself in a chair by the open window, for it was a hot night, he waited for the performance to reach its conclusion. Until that moment he had never realized how much he disliked the Colonel.

"Very pretty," said that gallant warrior, when the accompaniment was finished. "I do not think, however, that the kissing was quite loud enough!"

"I thought it excellent," Reggie remarked quietly. "Forgive me, I did not mean to interrupt you," he continued, as Stella and the Colonel turned swiftly round and faced him.

"Why, Reggie, I had no idea that you were

in the room," cried Stella. "You must have come in as quietly as a cat."

"I hope I didn't frighten the music away then," he returned, with what was almost a forced laugh. "Won't you sing something else? Your voice blends admirably with the Colonel's."

Stella, however, would not hear of it. She declared that she was too tired to sing or play anything else.

"After all," said the Colonel, "the only instrument to sing to is the guitar. And one seldom hears that in England now-a-days. Ah! those delicious nights in old Spain, with the clinking of the guitars in the silent streets, and the fair señorita listening behind the lattice."

"And papa waiting round the corner with his stiletto up his sleeve, ready to bury six inches of cold steel in your body as you wend your way homeward. Yes, I suppose there is plenty of romance still left in old Spain!"

The Colonel looked sharply up at the young man. He had a notion that he was being laughed at, and he was not accustomed to that sort of treatment.

Presently Stella asked them to excuse her and left the room. She returned a few moments later carrying a large fan. The conversation then recommenced, and for half-an-hour they

discussed Society and its doings. Then Mrs. Bennett entered the room, stifling a yawn behind her hand as she did so. After remarking that she had finished her letter to her aunt in Australia, she subsided into a semi-conscious condition on the sofa, from which she was roused by Reggie's rising to say good-night.

"If you are going my way we may as well walk as far as the corner together," said the Colonel, who had also risen.

"By all means," said Reggie politely, though he had not the least desire for the other's society.

Their hostess accompanied them to the hall.

"Shall we ride together to-morrow afternoon?" she inquired of her lover.

"By all means if you care about it," he answered. "I will call for you at the usual time."

"And you will find me ready," she returned.

Then the two men left the house.

As they strode down the silent street, Reggie regretted that he had dismissed his cab. He did not like the Colonel, and he had no objection to that gentleman knowing this. The other, however, was not to be snubbed. His skin, when he chose, could be of rhinoceros-like thickness. He laid himself out to please, but he soon found that he had entered upon a hopeless task. At

the corner they stopped, and the Colonel held out his hand. Reggie made as though he did not notice the action, but busied himself lighting his cigar. That operation accomplished, he bade his companion good-night, and walked away down a side street.

"I don't trust that man further than I can see him," said Reggie to himself as he made his way homewards. "When I am married, I'll trouble him to keep himself religiously on the street side of my front door."

Upon returning to his chambers on the following afternoon, to dress for the ride in the Park, he found a note from Stella. It ran as follows—

"MY DEAREST BOY,

"I am down with a splitting headache this afternoon, and could no more sit Satanella than I could fly. Forgive me if I do not ride with you. I hope you will not be *very* disappointed. Don't forget, however, that we are to dine together at the Carolus to-night, and that we go on to the Folly Theatre afterwards.

"Ever yours lovingly,

"STELLA."

"Well, I may as well have my ride whether she comes or not," said Reggie to himself.


"There's nothing else to be done, and I may find somebody in the Park who will take compassion upon me."

He accordingly mounted his hack, and set off. Upon entering the Park gates, he met two men of his acquaintance, and in their company proceeded down the Row. The latter was crowded on that particular afternoon. It had been rumoured that royalty would pass through, and all the world was there in consequence. On every hand the young man recognized friends, and it was with a little sinking of the heart that Reggie realized that their greeting to himself was more cordial than it had been on the previous afternoon.

Suddenly he became interested in the movements of a party of four in front of him. It was made up of three ladies and a gentleman, the latter being mounted on a handsome bay, that required more than a little riding. It was upon the lady next to him, however, that Reggie bestowed most attention.

"Surely it can't be," he said to himself. "Yet I would almost swear to the figure and the shape of the head."

As he drew nearer the party he felt that his surmises were correct, and closer inspection told him that he was not wrong. The lady in question was none other than his cousin Dorothy.





Their cavalier was young George Derrington, of the Blues, and the two other girls, his sisters. The Derringtons owned a fine property in the neighbourhood of Weldersham, and their father sat as Member for the county.

"Why, Dorothy, this is no end of a surprise," said Reggie, as he rode alongside. "I had no idea you thought of coming to town. You said nothing to me about it."

"I did not know that I was coming myself, nor should I have done had not Mrs. Derrington so kindly invited me to stay with her for Derby week. At first I did not know what to do about leaving uncle, but he insisted upon my coming."

"And how is he?" Reggie inquired. "The last bulletin I received stated that he was much better."

"Oh, he is almost himself again," the girl replied. "The doctor is very pleased with the progress he has made."

At this juncture young Derrington found an excuse to drop behind, thus allowing the cousins to ride side by side. Reggie looked at Dorothy admiringly. When he had seen her in her white dress in the old hall at Weldersham, he had told himself that she was one of the prettiest girls he had seen for many a long day; now he thought her lovely. He remembered with pride that it

was he who had taught her to ride; and he reminded her with a laugh of the old shaggy pony Punch upon whose back those lessons were given.

"How long ago it all seems," she said almost sadly. "Do you remember the day when I was first allowed to canter round the park by myself? Punch got out of hand, and being tired of lessons was anxious to return to his stable. What a battle we had!"

"And I remember how angry I was," said Reggie. "I jumped him backwards and forwards over the brook. And so you are actually going to the Derby?"

"Yes," she answered, falling back into the phraseology of their childhood, "really and truly, and I hope I am going to see Knight of Malta win. Look, Reggie, there is old Lady Reynolds, and her wig is more palpable than ever. Do you remember the day when the hounds met at Cripsly Wood, and her horse took her under the tree and scraped her toupee off. You weren't a bit sorry for the poor old thing, but I can assure you I was!"

"How can you tell such a story, Dot. You know very well that you laughed until you nearly fell off old Perkin Warbeck's back. Let us hope her ladyship won't see us, or she'll join

us for a certainty. In that case folk will think she is your mother."

"I'll tell mamma that, and let you know what she says. If there's one person she dislikes in this world it is Lady Reynsley. The latter told her once that a year's finishing at a stiff school would do me all the good in the world, as my manners were worse than uncouth. What do you think of that?"

"That she is an old cat. I was not aware that I disliked her so much!"

By this time their friends in front had quickened their pace, and were some distance ahead.

"Let us have a canter," said Reggie. "It's years since we had one together."

They accordingly set their horses going, and went sweeping down the tan. When they pulled up Dorothy's horse began to plunge violently, but she sat him with all the confidence of a professional horsebreaker, and at last reduced him to obedience.

"Bravo!" cried Reggie enthusiastically. "You managed him beautifully, Dot! I can see that my lessons have borne good fruit." He glanced round to see who had witnessed the performance, and then gave a little start as he found himself face to face with Stella. Her expression was by

no means one of approval. She had followed the couple down the Row and had noted the manner in which they had laughed and joked together. For the first time since her engagement she was permitting herself to become jealous.

"Why, Stella!" cried Reggie, "this is indeed a surprise. Your note said that you were feeling too ill to ride this afternoon."

"I changed my mind," the other replied. "I sent a note round immediately afterwards to tell you. But I suppose, since you are here, you had gone before it arrived."

She spoke in a petulant tone, as if she half-suspected him of throwing her over in favour of the friend with whom he was now riding.

"I am sorry I did not receive it," he answered. "But let me introduce you to my cousin, Miss Maddison, who is up in town for the Derby. I have often spoken of her to you."

The ladies bowed to each other. Then turning their horses' heads, they rode back by the way they had come, but in a very different spirit. Stella was evidently sulky; Dorothy was ill at ease, while Reggie's former gaiety had deserted him entirely. He tried his best, however, to behave as usual, in order that other people might not think there was anything amiss. It is one of our many peculiarities always to imagine that

other people are closely watching ourselves and our affairs.

When they reached the corner Dorothy bade them "good-bye," on the excuse that she must join her own party, and, with a pleasant little nod to Stella, rode off. Reggie and the latter thereupon turned their horses' heads and rode back by the way they had come.

"And so that is your cousin, who lives with your uncle at Weldersham, is it?" Stella began. "She is certainly very pretty, don't you think so?"

"I had no idea she had grown into such a lovely girl until I went down to Weldersham the other day. It was some time since I had seen her."

This was a foolish speech on his part, and it had the effect of adding fuel to the other's wrath.

"Reggie," said Stella at last, "doesn't it strike you as being rather strange that none of your family have written to congratulate you on your engagement? At least, if they have, you have not shown me their letters!"

As a matter of fact no one, with the exception of his cousin Bertram, who at the same time had made a point of soliciting a loan of ten pounds, had written to him at all.

"Oh, I've been congratulated by a lot of

people," he answered ambiguously. "I suppose you have too!"

"Oh, by hundreds!" she returned sarcastically. "All the dowagers of England have called upon me to 'express their delight. Letters pour in by every post, and half my time is occupied endeavouring to cope with my correspondence."

Reggie was at a loss to understand her behaviour. Only the other day she had been all affability, now since their engagement had been announced she seemed to have completely changed.

"I'm afraid, dear," he said, "that your headache must still be very bad. Wouldn't you like to go home?"

She glanced at him suspiciously.

"Will you come home with me?"

"Of course, if you wish it," he answered. "Why not?"

"I thought you might prefer to remain here," she said. "As you said just now, you have not seen your cousin for so long!"

"Stella," he said severely, "I am beginning to believe that you are angry because you found me riding with poor little Dorothy. Surely that cannot be the case?"

"I don't mind admitting it—I am jealous!" she replied, looking straight before her. "I am jealous of every woman who speaks to you. And

I always shall be! I want you for myself, and for myself alone! Besides, did you notice the way she looked at me? Some of the wretches who have been trying so hard to spoil my life have been telling her things!"

"There is nothing to tell, dear," said Reggie. "And, what is more, I am quite sure that Dorothy would be too loyal to me to believe anything against the lady who is to be my wife."

"Only because I am to be your wife. It is exactly of that I complain. She would believe it if I were to remain Mrs. Dartrell. Can't you see that? Because, however, you have chosen me for your wife, she is willing to take me on trust."

"She knows that unless I thought you fit to be my wife I should not have chosen you."

She did not answer, and they continued their ride for some time in silence, then left the Park by Grosvenor Gate and made their way to Brook Street, where he sent his horse home in charge of Stella's groom. From the butler they learnt that her cousin and companion were out shopping, for which for once in his life he was inclined to be sorry.

On reaching the drawing-room they found afternoon tea prepared for them. Stella was in very low spirits, and seemed inclined to break into tears at a moment's notice. She poured Reggie

out a cup of tea, and invited him to help himself to the cakes and other confectioneries on the stand beside the tea-table. It was plain to him that she was suffering from an attack of suppressed emotion. It was not long before the storm burst. At last she could contain herself no longer, and leaving her chair, she threw herself on her knees before him and clasped his hands in hers.

"My darling," she cried in heartbroken tones, "you can see how weak I am! I have been so lonely, and it has worn me out! Forgive me, Reggie, oh, forgive me! I did not mean to make you angry with me."

"There is nothing for me to forgive," he answered, pained by the piteous expression upon her face. "I don't like to see you like this, however. I don't remember ever seeing you so low-spirited before we were engaged. You are happy, are you not?"

"I am happy as long as you love me," she answered. "If I thought you did not I should kill myself, I believe, at once. You have no idea what you are to me. But you must love me with your whole heart and soul. You must never think of any other woman, or allow me to be jealous for a moment. By this alone can you save me from myself."

She covered her face with her hands, and com-



menced to cry. Reggie did his best to soothe her, but it was some time before he succeeded.

"You see what a weak-minded baby I am," she cried, as she rose to her feet. "I must go to my room and bathe my eyes, or Mrs. Bennett will think we have been quarrelling."

During her absence Reggie sat and pondered over her behaviour. Then he demolished a plate of cakes with the satisfaction of a man who has never been called upon to study his digestion, poured out for himself, and drank, a second cup of tea, and then sauntered to the window. From that point of vantage he witnessed a fight between two gutter urchins over a piece of banana peel, kept his eye on a horsey-looking loafer who sauntered down the other side of the way, and eventually came to a standstill beneath a lamp-post. He had not been there many minutes before the door of the house in front of which he was standing opened, and the butler emerged. After looking up and down the street, the latter approached the loafer and started an animated conversation with him. Presently money changed hands, whereupon the loafer touched his cap and sped off in the opposite direction to that by which he had come. He was still wondering what this little drama meant when the door opened and Stella, after upwards of half-an-hour's absence, entered the room. He was delighted to see that

she appeared to be her old self once more. Putting her arms round his neck she kissed him.

"Try to f<sup>r</sup>g<sup>i</sup>ve me, Reggie," she said, "for my silliness. I was run down, and, I suppose, a little hysterical. It shan't happen again."

Reggie returned her kiss, and then led her to a chair beside the tea-table. After this he reseated himself. There was a look of surprise and almost of horror upon his face as he did so. He tried to appear himself, but could not manage it. Words refused to come to his assistance. It was not so with Stella, however. All her old vitality had returned, and she laughed and joked, apparently as happy as a child. She rallied her lover on his quietness, prophesied all sorts of happiness for their future, and was as different to the woman who had knelt at his feet crying half-an-hour before as light from darkness.

As I have said, they had arranged to dine at the Carolus Restaurant that evening and afterwards to visit the Folly Theatre. When Reggie reached the restaurant two hours later a note was handed to him by the manager. It was from Stella, and informed him that her headache had returned, and that she would not be able to join him at dinner, but that she would meet him at the theatre afterwards. He dined and went on there, only to find on his arrival that she

had not yet put in an appearance. He accordingly waited in the vestibule. A few moments before the commencement of the performance her carriage drove up.

"I am sorry you did not feel equal to the dinner," he said, as he helped her to alight. "I hope you feel better?"

"Much better," she answered. "Much better!"

He led her into the theatre, and along the softly-carpeted corridor to the door nearest to the box he had engaged. She sank into her seat with a sigh of relief, as if the mere act of walking in from the street had tired her. Her eyes closed for a moment, and Reggie glanced anxiously at her; for a minute he thought she was going to faint.

"Do you feel ill, dear?" he asked.

"No, no! I'm well enough," she answered. "Only tired—very tired."

Fortunately at that moment the lights sank, and the curtain rose. Stella opened her eyes and looked at the stage as if she were scarcely conscious of what was going on there.

I am inclined to think that when the curtain fell upon the last act, Reggie would have found it difficult to have given you anything like a fair account of the piece. He escorted Stella home; refused to enter the house on the plea that it was too late; bade her good-bye on the pavement,

and then set off to walk back to his chambers in Mount Street.

The ghastly suspicion of the afternoon had been confirmed. God help him ! What was he to do ?

## CHAPTER V

IT was Derby Day ! A day anxiously looked forward to by thousands, nay, one might even say, by millions of people. A festival popular alike with rich and poor, high and low ; a day that gathers together the racing fraternity of the north and of the south, of the east and of the west ; a day on which the reputation of a horse and jockey may be made at one bound ; on which may be achieved the ambition of a lifetime—or which may see long cherished hopes fall to the ground like so much spilt water. We are told by many folk, who should know better, that the good days have departed altogether from English racing, and that with the advent of the train the enjoyment of travelling to Epsom by road has vanished too. Worthy gentlemen, who in the sixties tooled their coaches down to the accompaniment of blowing horns, and the fusillades of innumerable pea-shooters, now make the journey in a luxurious saloon carriage, and vow that the change is for the worst. They would appear to

regret the chance of accident on the road, the dust, the chaff of the good-natured cad, to say nothing of the importunities of the gipsy fortune-tellers, and the loafing race-card man. But in their hearts we know that they do not.

"Ah!" said old Lord Greystairs, solemnly wagging his head as he sat in the bow-window of his club and quizzed everybody; "you young fellows don't know what life is now."

But his nephew, young Marmaduke Lackless, who boasts a string of race-horses at Newmarket, a dozen polo-ponies, a racing-yacht on the Solent, to say nothing of half-a-hundred other little pleasures, feels inclined to differ from him; though, as he wants the old fellow's money, and is a prudent youth in such matters, he takes very good care not to contradict his uncle.

"Hounds do not run now as they did in my day," cries the venerable huntsman. "Racing is not what it was in my time," declares the turfite of the forties, while "Life is not at all what it was when I first saw the Town," asserts the grey-haired reprobate of three-score years and ten."

But in commenting on these amiable weaknesses in others, I am digressing from my own story. What I have to describe is Reggie Sandridge's Derby Day, and to that task I must now turn.

The day on which the great race was to be run broke as auspiciously as the heart of man could desire. A shower in the early morning laid the dust on the roads and washed it from the leaves in the hedges, so that they looked upon the world in all their bravery of summer green. In spite of the gloomy prophecies on which I have already commented, the road was crowded ; coaches, chars-a-bancs, and omnibuses, released from the duties of the streets, and driven by gentlemen who might very well, from their appearance, including cigar and buttonhole, have never heard the warning cry, " 'igher up there ! " Hansoms with luncheon baskets on the roof, donkey-drawn costers' barrows, dainty victorias, motor-cars, bicycles, and in fact every description of vehicle might be seen making its way along the road towards the Downs. As the papers next day set forth, the crowd was as large, if not larger, than that of the preceding year. There were coaches on the hill, coaches in the dip, and coaches and carriages three or four deep along the rails. The outside betting gentlemen were gathered together by the score, and the virtues of each were set forth in no measured terms on the banners beneath which he stood ready to do 'battle with the neophyte. There was honest Jack Gates, of Birmingham, who paid on the nail, though his looks belied the

assertion ; there was your old pal, Ned Sykes of Sheffield, who laid the most liberal odds, or would have you believe he did ; and innumerable others. Cocoa-nut shies vied with the shooting-galleries in popularity, steam roundabouts with swinging-boats, masked mandolinists, working of course in furtherance of some charity, and nigger minstrels, whose charity began and ended at home. On the course proper an enormous crowd had collected, to saunter up and down and to gather wisdom from the oratory of the tipsters, who were offering to make the fortune of any one present for an insignificant sum. There were hawkers, fortune-tellers, proprietors of roulette tables, and the inevitable individual with the bucket of lemon-and-water, which he stirs continually with his finger and describes as "a drop of something cool."

Reggie had arranged to drive down to Epsom, and his party consisted of Stella, Mrs. Bennett, the American cousin, little Stukeley, Lord Dorset, and Sir George Welbrooke. At Stella's request the coach was not taken into the members' enclosure, but placed in a position near the rails, where they could see all that went on, and at the same time have the advantage of not being too prominent themselves.

On the way down, Stella, looking as beautiful as Reggie had ever seen her, sat beside him on



the box. A full reconciliation had taken place between them, though Reggie could not quite remove from his mind the traces of a terrible suspicion that had been haunting him like a nightmare. They reached Epsom Downs in good time, and then, when the horses had been removed by the servants, the gentlemen helped the ladies to descend. This was Mamie Morrison the American cousin's first visit to the historic race-course, and she expressed herself as delighted with the novelty of the scene spread out before her. Mrs. Bennett would have preferred remaining on top of the coach, but as the others were bent upon descending there was nothing for it but for her to submit and follow their example. In couples they made their way down to the course proper, and passed into the enclosure. Reggie was well known, and from every hand came inquiries as to the prospects of his horse. Was he doing well? Was there any truth in the rumour that he had strained a tendon? To these questions the owner replied to the best of his ability. The horse was as fit as human hands could make him, and if he did not win it would not be for want of trying.

At last, on the further side, Reggie came across Bateson. He introduced him to Stella, and then inquired after the horse.

"He's first-rate, sir," the trainer replied. "I

wouldn't wish to send an animal to the post in better form. He travelled down as cool as a cucumber, and cleaned his manger up this morning as if he were in his own box at home."

"And Bassage?"

"He's as confident as I am, sir," Bateson answered. "We need have no fear that he will do his best for us, for I happen to know on the quiet that he stands to win a considerable stake on him."

"I'm glad to hear it! And now I suppose it's time for the first race."

They accordingly returned to the coach.

The first event on the card proved to be a tame affair, the favourite cantering in some half-dozen lengths to the good. After the first two races had been run, the signal was given for luncheon, and the knives and forks were soon clattering, and champagne corks popping. That important meal dispatched, a move was made to the paddock, where preparations for the great event of the day were in full swing. After a little search Knight of Malta was discovered, surrounded by a crowd of admirers.

"How beautiful he looks!" said Stella with flashing eyes. "Oh, Reggie, a horse like that could never be beaten. He's the most beautiful animal I've ever seen."

The animal, as if in acknowledgment of the compliment paid him, put back his ears, and gave a playful little kick at the people standing behind him. Indeed there could be no doubt that he was in excellent fettle. Bateson had brought him to the post in the pink of condition, and if his speed equalled his looks those who saw him felt that victory was assured.

"Looks as if he'd run till he drops," said Welbrooke.

"I must have another pony on him," said the Earl of Dorset, "if it is only for the bloom on his coat. Reggie, my lad, this is going to be a big day, I feel it!"

At that moment, Belton, the commissioner, joined them and approached Reggie. He had been looking for him all over the paddock, he declared.

"Well, what news, Belton?" the latter asked.

"They've made him favourite at last, sir," said the other. "Carriekfergus has gone back. They seem to think he's too big."

"What are they laying about the Knight?"

"Six to four, sir, and by the time they parade I shouldn't be surprised to see it even money."

"In that case you can put me on another monkey," Reggie remarked.

"The same for me," said Lord Dorset; while

Stella added, "I think I must have fifty pounds more."

It wanted only a quarter of an hour now of starting time, and the roar of the ring was almost deafening.

"Where's Bassage?" said Bateson irritably. "I wonder what has become of the fellow?"

He had scarcely finished speaking before the famous jockey made his appearance, as leisurely and composedly as if he were going for a canter in the Row.

"Now, look here, Bassage," said Reggie, taking him a little on one side so that the crowd should not hear what he had to say to him. "I fancy the horse is good enough to win. What do you think?"

"I'm sure of it," the other replied. "I look forward to your leading him in."

"Of course you'll stand the usual thousand to nothing."

"Thank you, sir," said the other. "I hope I shall take it from you. Now I suppose it's time for me to be getting up."

Pushing his way through the circle which surrounded the horse, Bassage drew off his coat and handed it to the man who followed him. When he (Bassage) had mounted, Bateson gave the leading-rein to the head lad, who led the horse out for the parade.

"I say, Dorset," said Reggie, as they strolled back towards the gate, "will you escort the ladies to the coach? I want to go into the stand for a moment."

Lord Dorset consented, and Reggie proceeded into the building in question in search of some one he felt sure he should find there. He was not disappointed.

The Derrington party received him most cordially.

"Bless my soul, I hope you'll win," said papa.

"Your horse looks lovely," remarked the eldest girl.

"We've backed him for a hatful of money," returned the son.

Dorothy, however, said but little. Her face was paler than usual and very anxious.

"I came in search of you, Dorothy," said Reggie, "in order that I might ask you to wish me luck."

"I wish you luck, Reggie, with all my heart," the girl replied in a husky voice.

"Thank you, dear!" he answered. "And now I must be getting back to my party."

A salvo of good wishes was fired after him as he strode away.

He reached the coach just in time for the parade. As he mounted to his seat the graceful animals began to pass in single file down the

course. Fifteen runners were left in, but the public interest was centred only on four. Whissendine was the first to pass. He was a handsome chestnut, like Knight of Malta in the pink of condition, but was known to be the possessor of an evil temper, though his appearance in public on this particular occasion would not have led one to suspect it. He was followed by a couple of outsiders, who were succeeded by Carrickfergus, a few moments before first favourite. The latter animal certainly did not look his best. He seemed jaded, as if his preparation had been too long. He was followed by Pride of the Pit, a showy but somewhat lengthy black, who threw his head about and was ridden in blinkers. Then Knight of Malta made his appearance, and with his coming a murmur of admiration ran along the course. The graceful animal carried himself as though he were aware of his responsibilities. His little feet seemed scarcely to touch the earth. No finer model of an English thoroughbred had ever been seen even on that classic course.

"Blowed if I've ever set eyes on anything like that," said a loafer, leaning on the rails a few yards from the coach. "If he ain't a beauty, then there never was one."

After the Knight had passed, the remainder of the contingent, with the exception of one who

was sent direct to the post, came by in their canter. That finished, they made their way to the starting-post. At this juncture the noise of the ring was deafening. The latest betting, so they were informed, was odds on the Knight. It was an anxious ten minutes, though Reggie and the rest of the party tried to make light of it. Shortly after the preliminary canter an old gipsy woman made her appearance beside the coach and attracted their attention.

"Let me tell your fortune, pretty gentleman," she began, looking up at the owner of the favourite. "It's a bonny face you have."

The horses were not nearly at the post and in fact would not be there for some few minutes. Anything was better than this suspense.

"So you shall, mother, if you can climb up here," Reggie replied.

The old woman clambered to the top of the wheels without a moment's hesitation, and held out her hand for the half-crown Reggie offered her. Stella and the others leant over to hear what she said. She crossed his hand with the silver and then croaked—

"You are young and handsome. I can see that without looking at your hand. There is one who loves you, and you don't know it; but you will not marry her yet. There's trouble to come between you—deep waters and a wild

life, but you will be happy in the end. You will see your children's children, and you will live to a ripe old age and die in your bed, respected and beloved by all who know you."

"With the exception of the trouble that's to come that is not altogether a bad outlook," Reggie answered, with a laugh. "But what do the deep waters mean?"

She shook her head.

"It's not for me to say," she replied. "The lines are there, and I can tell only what I see."

"And now will you tell me my fortune?" said Stella, holding out the same sum as Reggie had given the old woman, and adding to her lover, "I must know how far my fate agrees with yours."

She gave her hand to the old woman, who bent over it and studied the palm carefully. She was so long about it, however, that Reggie feared that the horses would be off before she had fulfilled her task. At last the woman raised her head and looked Stella in the face.

"The pretty lady must forgive me," she said, "but the gipsy cannot read her hand."

"What nonsense!" cried Stella, pettishly. "Of course you can make up some sort of a story. You never do any more."

"Oh yes, I can do that, lady," returned the



gipsy, and once more she studied the palm. After some seconds she continued, "You have been married, and you think you love again. You desire happiness, but it flies away." Here she paused as if trying to invent something. "You will find true peace only in marriage, but beware of the deep waters. The gipsy can say no more."

Stella drew her hand away angrily.

"Deep waters again!" she snapped. "If I had known you were going to talk of such rubbish I wouldn't have wasted half-a-crown upon you."

There was something in her face, however, which gave one the impression that the old woman's words, vain though she professed to believe them, had startled her, and Reggie wished from the bottom of his heart that he had not allowed her to come up on to the coach. However, the effect produced by the dismal prophecy was almost obliterated by the fortune she promised to Stukeley, who was told that he would be married within the year to a stout widow with a large fortune, that his business in the City would improve, and that he would end by being an Alderman of London and perhaps Lord Mayor.

The gipsy looked round to see if there was any other money to be earned, but at that

moment the cry, "They're off!" robbed her of their attention. Every glass in the coach was immediately levelled on that gaily-coloured crowd across the Downs.

It turned out, however, to be a false start. One of the unknown quantities at the bottom of the card had broken away, and had completed a considerable portion of the distance of the course before his rider could bring him to a standstill. Then he trotted slowly back to join his companions, as if proud of the attention he had attracted by his impetuosity. A second false start was followed by a third, each caused by the same irresponsible brute.

"Confound the horse," said Reggie viciously. "If he goes on like this he may upset the Knight, then who knows what may happen!"

"Don't be afraid of that—he'll be all right, old man," remarked Lord Dorset from behind him, putting his hand on Reggie's shoulder. "It will take more than that to put him out. Keep cool, and in a few minutes from now you'll be on the course leading him back, the proudest man in all England."

"We'd better not count our chickens until they're hatched," replied Reggie. "It's a good old saying that the Derby isn't won till the horses have passed the post."

Stukeley, who was standing behind Stella,

noticed that her hands trembled as she held the glasses to her eyes. Could she have known how much depended on the next few minutes I fancy it is doubtful whether she would have had the pluck to have looked at all. Ah! well indeed is it for us that we are unable to see into our Future! If the sorrows that have to be endured could be suddenly revealed to us in a magic mirror, I wonder, my readers, whether we should have the nerve to gaze into it.

The roar of the ring hushed for a moment, rose again, then it stopped suddenly as the great cry went up, "They're off." This time there was no doubt about it.

"Little Charmer is in front," said Reggie, "Goldielocks second, with Whissendine alongside. The Knight is lying fourth."

The pace was certainly a cracker. As they approached the hill, Pride of the Pit passed the leader and took up the running. Whissendine lying second, while Knight of Malta was well on the outside. Carrickfergus was in the ruck by this time, hopelessly done for. Tattenham Corner once behind them, Bassage evidently thought it was time to come to terms with his horses. He accordingly began to send the Knight along. Little by little he overhauled Whissendine, who had very nearly shot his bolt. Then came up a great shout from the watching multi-

tude, "Knight of Malta wins!" "Knight of Malta wins!" "No! No! Whissendine, Whissendine has it!" "Knight of Malta wins!" "Knight of Malta for a thousand!" The distance to be covered now was scarcely a hundred yards, and the two leaders were neck and neck. Suddenly one of the unheard-of division, a chestnut named The Mexican, came with a sudden rush and looked like catching them. But the Knight by this time had increased his lead, and was now a full half-length to the good.

"It's all over; you've won, old chap," cried Lord Dorset, bringing his hand down with a whack upon the other's shoulder. "I never was so happy in my life."

Alas! He spoke too soon! No one to this day has ever been able to say exactly how it happened, some say that he crossed his legs, others that he trod upon a stone; the fact, however, remains that, scarcely half-a-dozen lengths from the winning-post, *Knight of Malta fell*.

It was so sudden, so entirely unexpected, that those who saw it could scarcely believe the evidence of their eyes. Bassage was thrown some yards away. Fortunately for him he was sufficiently far ahead to enable the other horses to spread out and avoid him, otherwise he must have been trampled to death. It was stated

afterwards, though no one seemed to have noticed it at the time, that The Mexican had won the Derby, Whissendine second, and another outside horse third. For some seconds after the catastrophe no one on the coach moved or spoke, then turning to Stella, Reggie said very quietly—

“Stay here! I must go down and see what can be done!”

Half dazed he jumped from the box to the ground, and hustled his way through the crowd to the open space, which was being kept by a strong force of police. A doctor was already kneeling by the side of the injured jockey, and Reggie hastened towards him.

“Is he much hurt, do you think?” he inquired. “I am the owner of the horse.”

“It is impossible to say yet,” said the medical man. “I am going to get him away from here as soon as possible. The course men have gone for a stretcher.”

Reggie went across to the horse. The two men who were standing beside it recognized him and touched their hats.

“This is a bad business, sir,” said one. “You’ll have everybody’s sympathy, that’s one thing!”

“Never mind the sympathy,” replied Reggie, “so long as the jockey isn’t killed. What is wrong with the horse, do you think?”

"I'm afraid he's broken his near fore," the man answered. "However, the vet. will be here in a minute, and he will be able to tell us the extent of the damage."

A short time after that gentleman made his appearance. He confirmed the other's opinion. Knight of Malta's last race was run. Never again would the grand animal hear the rustle of the silken jackets, or the shouts of an excited crowd. Reggie knelt beside him and patted the animal's sleek neck.

"What shall we do with him, sir?" asked the veterinary surgeon. "I am afraid it will be a difficult matter to move him, and even if we do the case is hopeless."

"In that case," Reggie replied, "there is nothing for it but to put the poor beast out of his misery as quickly as possible."

Reggie did not wait to see the end of Knight of Malta, but accompanied by Lord Dorset, who had joined him, made his way to the room whither they had carried the ill-starred jockey. When they entered it the poor fellow was just recovering consciousness. The doctor who was attending him reassured Reggie as to his condition.

"You need not be alarmed, sir," he said. "He has had a very severe shaking, otherwise I do not think there is very much damage."

"Let all that is possible be done for him," continued Reggie.

Up to that time Reggie had been so taken up with the sufferings of horse and man, that he had had no time to think of the knock-down blow he had himself received. Now, however, he began to consider his own position. That he was to all intents and purposes ruined there could be no doubt. There might be a few hundreds left, when all his creditors were paid, but there would be little more. At any rate, it would be too small an amount to allow him to continue the life he had hitherto been leading. What was he to do was the question he asked himself.

"I suppose we had better be getting back to the coach," he said to his friend, when they passed out into the open air once more.

"Perhaps it would be as well," the other replied. "I vote for having the horses put in and driving home right off."

"We'll see what the rest of them have to say to it," Reggie answered. "I don't want to spoil their sport."

Lord Dorset's charitable proposition, however, was forestalled. When they reached the coach they found it moved out of its position, and the horses being got ready to start.

"This was your doing, dear," said Reggie to Stella. "It was kind of you."

"We all thought it better," she replied. "We knew you would not like to stay on the course after what has happened! Let us get away as soon as possible. I shall not be happy until we are at home once more."

When the preparations were complete, Reggie mounted to his seat and took the reins. The horses were going to the post for the Caterham Stakes, but they did not wait to see the race run. They one and all had had enough racing for one day.

The return journey to London was a very different one to that down to the course. Then the party had been in the highest spirits, looking forward to the victory which they had felt was assured. Now it was all over, and the hopes upon which they had been building so confidently were turned to Dead Sea fruit. There was not one of the party who had not lost heavily—Mrs. Bennett included, who had gone so far as to risk ten pounds out of her savings on Knight of Malta's chance. As for little Stukeley he scarcely dared to contemplate the future. It would take, he declared, a good deal more than his full salary for many months to come to put him straight.

"Good sportsman, ain't he?" said that little individual to Sir George Welbrooke, who sat beside him. "Takes his facer like a man! And it must be a facer too! Poor old Reggie! Lord



bless me, what asses we are to go on backing horses ! ”

As for the young man, whose sympathies they had enlisted, he tooled his team back to Town with the skill of a thorough workman. His manner was as serene as ever it had been, his complacency as marked, as if nothing out of the common had occurred.

So certain had Reggie been of success that it had been arranged that the entire party should dine with him that evening at a well-known Regent Street restaurant to celebrate the event. Lord Dorset and Stukeley now proposed that the dinner should be cancelled. Reggie, however, would not hear of such a thing.

“Why should we not see the day out together ? ” he argued. “As we have had a bad time of it, there is all the more reason that we should endeavour to cheer ourselves up to-night. What do you say, Stella ? ”

“I am ready for anything that will make you happy,” she replied. “By all means let us dine together, if you wish it.”

It was arranged, therefore, that the dinner should take place, and when Reggie had dropped the ladies at Brook Street, and deposited the gentlemen at Welbrooke’s club, he drove himself home to Mount Street, where he gave up the coach to the grooms. His own servant who

had accompanied him, followed him into the house. The man possessed that rare attribute of being attached to his master. The man was also aware of the change the day's events would make in his own affairs. He was too well trained, however, to give any utterance to his feelings, but in one or two little ways managed to let his employer see how sincere his sympathy was.

"Lord bless us!" he said to the butler of the flat below, when he encountered him on the stairs, "if you had 'a seen his face to-day, you would never have guessed he had gone wrong at all. If you and me had had such a tap below the belt, as he got, I don't think we should carry such a straight face on it."

"That's the way with 'em thoroughbred blokes," the other returned. "They never let you know when they're down. I'm sorry for your guv'nor, for he's as nice and pleasant a gentleman as ever I've seen. When I meets him on the stairs he always passes me a pleasant word, not like some of the jokers I could mention. If by any chance you ever left him, bless me if I wouldn't——"

"What are you talking about?" asked the other sharply. "I've been with him now six years and a half, and my father was with his father. Don't you talk of me a leavin' him, or you and me 'll be falling out. Mark that!"

Though some of my readers may not agree with

me, I think I should be right were I to say that the world would be a pleasanter place were there a few more servants as loyal to their masters as was Reggie's man.

The dinner that night was a greater success than had been anticipated. Each guest made his or her appearance with the intention of doing all that was possible to promote the general happiness, and in consequence the result was better than could have been expected under the circumstances. Only one little incident occurred to ruffle the general smoothness. The ices had just been handed, when one of the waiters brought a note upon a salver. This he handed to Reggie, who glanced at the handwriting upon the envelope. He recognized it immediately, and placed the letter beside his plate. It was from Dorothy.

"Who brought this?" he inquired.

"It came from your chambers, by your servant, sir," the man replied.

"Pray open it," said Stella. "We will excuse you."

Reggie did so and withdrew the contents. The note ran as follows—

"DEAR OLD REGGIE,

"I cannot tell you how truly sorry I am for you in your great misfortune. It was a terrible thing to witness, and what a blow it

must have been to you ! I hope the poor jockey is not much hurt.

“ With real sympathy,

“ From your affectionate cousin,

“ DOROTHY MADDISON.”

When he had read it he refolded the letter and placed it in his pocket. As he did so he saw that Stella's eyes were fixed upon him. Doubtless she had guessed the identity of the writer, and for a moment Reggie thought she was going to comment upon it. She said nothing on the subject, however, but continued her conversation with Sir George, who was describing to her the custom of certain native tribes with whom he had been brought in contact during his explorations in the Dark Continent.

“ Now look here,” said Lord Dorset, when the servants had withdrawn, and the party were left to themselves. “ I have something to propose. It is admitted that we have all had a bad week. Now you know my old tub, the *Wandering Minstrel* ? ”

“ A remarkably comfortable old tub, since you prefer the term,” said little Stukeley, who had spent many pleasant hours aboard the vessel in question, and who looked forward to spending a few more in the same way.

“ She is lying at Southampton at the present

moment—waiting for me. She has accommodation for at least a dozen—and she can manage fifteen at a pinch. Now what do you say to brushing the cobwebs of the last week away by means of a week's cruise down Channel? We might cross to Dieppe—then to Cherbourg and the Channel Islands, and home by Plymouth and the south coast."

"It's not half a bad idea, by Jove," said Sir George Welbrooke heartily. "What say you, Mrs. Dartrell?"

"I should be more than delighted to accept," she answered. "I adore yachting."

The other ladies of the party agreed only too willingly—the American cousin in particular. Little Stukeley said he would be delighted to join the party, provided he could get leave from the Authorities.

"They'll be only too glad to get rid of you," said Lord Dorset. "You know as well as I do that you never do any work at the office. But you haven't told me what you think, Reggie?"

"I shall be very pleased to come," the latter replied, but without any great enthusiasm. "It certainly will be a change."

Stella looked at him anxiously. Not being able to account for his present humour, she, with feminine perversity, attributed it to the

note he had received a quarter of an hour before.

"In that case it's settled," said the young peer. "If you can all manage it, we'll go down to Southampton on Saturday morning. I'll send a wire to-morrow to the skipper, and by the time we get back again we shall have forgotten the Derby and all connected with it. Take my word for it, we'll have no end of a time."

"I hope I shall not be ill," remarked Mrs. Bennett with a sigh. "It is only fair to warn you that I am not always a good sailor."

"You mustn't think of it," said Sir George. "You'll be all right, never fear."

It was on the stroke of eleven when the party left the restaurant and bade each other good-bye on the pavement. Mrs. Bennett and the American cousin were to drive home together in the brougham, Reggie escorting Stella in a hansom.

"Oh, Reggie dear," said his *fiancée*, when they were once alone together, "you don't know how I have been longing for this moment. What can I say to comfort you, my poor boy, for your terrible disappointment to-day?"

"Don't say anything," he answered almost abruptly. "I've been pretty hard hit, it is true; but I want to try and forget all about it for the time being."

"I wonder if it is your association with me

that has brought you such ill-luck ? ” Stella continued, slipping her arm through his. “ And yet I think you know that I would do anything under the sun to help you.”

“ Yes, I know that,” he answered, “ but, as I said a moment ago, let us try to forget the whole thing, if only for to-night.”

There was a short silence, during which she took his hand.

“ Reggie,” she said, “ do you remember that night on the river, when I asked you to let me help you if matters did not go as you hoped they would to-day ? Won’t you let me do so now ? You can have no idea what happiness it would give me even to do one little thing to assist you in your trouble.”

“ You’re a good girl, Stella,” he replied, “ but I don’t think it’s quite as bad as that ! ”

“ You will not let me assist you, then ? ” she asked almost impatiently. “ And why not ? ”

“ Only because that at present there is no need for it,” he returned. “ I am just as grateful to you, however, as if you had lent me ten thousand.”

“ But if your cousin Dorothy had offered to help you ? ‘ What would you have said ? ’ ”

Reggie winced. He did not know why the mere mention of Dorothy’s name was sufficient

to set all his nerves tingling. He did not retort, however.

"Poor little Dorothy," he said. "She, like you, would help me if she could, but she has nothing beyond her allowance."

When they reached the house in Brook Street, Reggie bade Stella good-bye in the hall, and then returned to his own chambers. As he walked along his thoughts turned to Dorothy and the note of sympathy he had received from her that night. He knew that she meant what she had written.

"Well, well," he muttered to himself; "I've not had a bad time of it while it has lasted. I suppose there may be a matter of five or six hundred left when everything's paid. But what's to happen then?" He was aware that Stella knew that he was ruined. At the same time he thought that he should inform her of the real facts of the case. He could not help wondering what she would say.

"Heaven help me," he said to himself, with a seriousness that was quite unusual, "what a miserable wretch I am. I wonder if it would be better for all parties concerned if I were to drop out of the running—like poor old Knight of Malta? In that case Dick would come into the title and the money. One thing is quite certain, the old man wouldn't be able to find any fault



with him on the score of marrying the wrong woman. All things considered it might be better for the family and the estates."

From this it may be gathered that Reggie did not know his cousin Richard quite as well as other people did.

Let us turn our thoughts to that gentleman. At that moment he was seated in his chambers at the Temple, pouring over his bank-book, and lamenting the fact that his cousin had all the advantages of life, while he was deprived of them.

"In all probability," he said to himself, "he's won the Derby and is fifty thousand pounds better off to-night than he was this morning."

At last Richard rose and placed his bank-book in the iron safe in the corner of the room.

Suddenly he felt a desire to learn the result of the race. This led him to the chambers of a sporting friend. From him he learnt the true state of the case. There could be no doubt about it this time. The lordly Reggie, who had patronized him, who had called him Dick, who had offered him a dinner, should he prove successful, was absolutely and completely ruined.

"No, not completely," said Richard to himself, with a bitter sigh. "He will have all uncle's money, and the old fellow is on his death-bed

now. Luck seems to run every man's way but mine."

This shows how little he realized the true circumstances of the case. While his cousin was thus soliloquizing, Reggie was, as I have said, slowly making his way homewards. He smoked a meditative cigar, and then retired and slept as peacefully as if he had won a hundred thousand instead of having lost nearly all he possessed in the world. A philosophic temperament is something after all !

## CHAPTER VI

THE pretty craft which Lord Dorset was in the habit of describing as his "tub," was one of the finest vessels of her class on Southampton Water. Her tonnage was upwards of five hundred; she possessed a charming little saloon, ten airy state-rooms, and was fitted and upholstered throughout to the last degree of comfort. She had originally been built for a French nobleman; when, however, that worthy saw fit to challenge the editor of a certain Parisian newspaper to a duel, and received a bullet through his brain for his pains, she was thrown upon her builder's hands. Then it was that her present owner had purchased her.

Reggie had made many trips in her, and was a prime favourite with both officers and crew.

It was certainly a merry party that assembled on the platform of Waterloo Station on the Saturday morning following the disastrous Derby described in the previous chapter. The only person about whose coming there had been any

doubt at all was little Stukeley, but when that worthy was seen making his way along the platform dressed in the most correct yachting costume, it was evident that he had been able to obtain leave.

"I can be away until Thursday next," he remarked. "Not an hour longer, however. I must be put ashore on that day, happen what may. It's an awful shame the way they overwork us. And just at the time when I feel that a breath of sea air will do me so much good. Where's Dorset?"

"He went down last night," Welbrooke replied. "He will receive us on board."

Their host, with the consideration characteristic of him, had made all the necessary arrangements for their comforts. A special saloon-carriage was awaiting them, and the journey down was accomplished in excellent time. They were met by the owner of the yacht at the gangway. He informed them that he had some other friends aboard, and led them towards the companion.

"Mrs. and Miss Cranleigh, and Colonel Devereux are going to accompany us," Lord Dorset remarked.

"Indeed," Stella replied; "that will be very pleasant."

There was, however, no great heartiness in her voice.

As a matter of fact she was deeply offended. Not, however, at the Colonel's presence, but because Lord Dorset should have invited Miss Cranleigh. She remembered that Reggie, during the previous season, had paid more attention than was necessary to the latter fair lady, and Stella neither desired nor intended that he should do so again.

As for Reggie, he found an early opportunity of questioning his friend concerning the presence of Colonel Devereux.

"What on earth made you invite that fellow?" he inquired.

"I could not help myself," Lord Dorset replied. "He asked point-blank to be allowed to come. But there, what difference does his presence make. He can be very amusing when he pleases, and, when you come to think of it, that's something on board ship."

"It's my belief he'd pick your pocket or cut your throat for a five-pound note," said Reggie angrily. "I wouldn't trust him further than I could see him."

Stella, however, soon showed that she had nothing but smiles for the gallant warrior. It is just possible that she may have been anxious to rouse a few sparks of jealousy in Reggie's breast. If this were her intention, however, she certainly was not successful.

It had been arranged that they should sail at three o'clock for Dieppe, proceeding thence down Channel as the fancy took them. Mrs. Bennett inquired whether the weather reports for the first portion of their voyage were favourable.

"The Channel's as calm as a mill-pond," Lord Dorset replied. "You need have no fear. The vessel will be as steady as your own drawing-room in Brook Street."

But the worthy lady shook her head. She had been beguiled before by such assurances, only to be bitterly deceived. The American cousin, however, was delighted. She had never seen such a yacht; not even at Newport. Her cousin, Mortimer Cave Dodbridge, whose doings and sayings she quoted at least once in every hour, possessed nothing to equal it. Having said this she looked down at the bread beside her plate and murmured—

"But ye see he hasn't your taste, Lord Dorset." A remark at which Mrs. and Miss Cranleigh exchanged glances.

"Keep your weather eye open, old man," said little Stukeley to his host when they were alone together after luncheon. "The fair American is setting her cap at you, and if you're not careful, you'll be nabbed like poor old Reggie."

"I'm sorry for Reggie," his lordship answered. "Why the deuce did he go and propose to that

woman? I'd bet five hundred pounds to a half-penny that he'd give all he's got in the world (and that's not very much) to be well out of the affair. You don't think he's in love with the fair Stella, do you?"

"Not a bit of it," Stukeley replied. "And she knows that as well as he does."

"Then I say again, why did he do it? Reggie knows what he is about as a general rule, and I shouldn't have thought he would have made such a fool of himself as he has done in this matter."

"How do you know that Stella didn't get him into a corner so that he couldn't help himself?" the other asked. "I've heard of such things being done, though, thank goodness, they've never played them on me."

It was nearly four o'clock that afternoon before the yacht got under way. At the last moment it was discovered that Mrs. Bennett's luggage had not come aboard, and it became necessary to send a boat in search of it. Eventually, however, it was found out and brought aboard. Then the accommodation-ladder was hoisted in, and the telegraph-bell sounded from the bridge. The cruise, which none of them were destined ever to forget, had commenced.

To my mind the scenery of Southampton Water is equal to anything to be discovered

along the south coast of England. Netley Hospital, the wooded hills of Hampshire, and the white cliffs of the Isle of Wight in the distance, are usually seen by the traveller under circumstances that fix them upon his memory for all time. They met steamers and pleasure vessels going up to the port, and later on were overhauled by a magnificent ocean liner. The afternoon was warm and sunny, and for the time being at least every one seemed to have thrown care to the winds. I wonder if you, gentle reader, have ever noticed what a short time it takes to split up a sea-going party into groups. Ours had not been three hours at sea ere they had distributed themselves. Mrs. Cranleigh, her daughter, and Sir George Welbrooke had made their way aft, and had seated themselves under the awning, talking and watching the picture unfolding itself astern. Mrs. Bennett, the American cousin, Stukeley, and Colonel Devereux, made up a group under the bridge, while Stella, Reggie, and the owner, had ascended that lofty altitude itself. Reggie looked at the great liner, which was then abreast of them, with interested eyes. Surely, he argued, in her large complement of passengers she must be carrying to the new world many men whose fortunes were as desperate as his own. Doubtless they were going out confident in



their strength to win fame and wealth in other climes. Could he not do the same? As if in answer to his thoughts Stella's voice reached him.

"When we are married, Reggie," she said, "you shall take me for a long voyage all round the world. We'll explore every out-of-the-way place, and not return until we know the globe as thoroughly as we do Bond Street."

Reggie had forgotten for the moment that his future was to be linked with hers. That she had money he knew; and that she would share it with him he also knew. But what would his position be then? He would have to play the part of the tame husband supported by a moneyed wife. The mere thought of such a thing cut him like a knife. And yet how many of his acquaintances were in a similar position. Then he brought his philosophy to the rescue, and argued that it was no use spoiling his holiday by indulging in miserable thoughts at the very commencement of it. Accordingly he determined not to think of the matter more than was necessary until his return to London.

At half-past five afternoon tea was served in the drawing-room, whither they repaired. The American cousin was delighted with the pretty little snuggery, while Mrs. Cranleigh expressed herself as charmed.

"May I ask you to officiate, Mrs. Dartrell?" their host inquired, pointing to the vacant chair behind the tea-tray.

Stella responded readily, and with an air that seemed to say, "At last I am in my proper place. As the affianced bride of the future Earl of Weldersham, there is no one here who can dispute it with me." After the meal they returned to the deck to find that Southampton was far behind them, and that the yacht's bows were pointed for Spithead. Lord Dorset's prophecy of a smooth passage was not destined to be fulfilled. It was well enough in the Solent, but when they opened out the Foreland, a choppy little sea caused the yacht to pitch more than was pleasant, thereby driving Mrs. Bennett, who up to that time had been making a brave show of promenading with Dorset, to the security of her chair. As Colonel Devereux heartlessly remarked to Stukeley, "*It was only a question of time with her now.*" The American cousin's hour had then come, and, having appropriated her host, she bade him tell her the meaning of everything. He took her to the bridge, showed her the telegraph and the compass, explained to her the elementary rules of navigation, and a hundred other items of vital importance. In conclusion she guessed that it was all very pretty and wonderful, and expressed a wish

that the voyage would continue for ever. Later the dressing-gong sounded and every one went below. Mesdames Bennett and Cranleigh were both bad sailors, the former especially, for she had no sooner reached her cabin than she threw herself down on her bed and refused to move again. She considered that in remaining on deck as long as she had done, she had fulfilled all that was required of her. As for Stella, she declared that she delighted in the motion, and indeed, she balanced herself on the heaving deck like a veritable Viking's daughter.

The dinner that evening was a most enjoyable function, despite the pitching of the yacht and the absence of the two elder ladies.

"Poor mamma," said Miss Cranleigh, "she is always so anxious to go to sea, yet she is never many hours aboard before she succumbs. However, if she has a glass of champagne and a biscuit to nibble she will soon be herself again."

Wine and biscuits were accordingly conveyed to the invalids, but though they sent messages of gratitude, they did not put in an appearance on deck again that night. When they rose from the dinner-table the Isle of Wight lay far behind them. Later the party adjourned to the saloon, where the Colonel amused them with selections from his extensive *répertoire*. Miss Cranleigh recited a thrilling tale of love and war, Stella

sang, the American cousin played the piano, while the others applauded as if in duty bound.

When the ladies retired the gentlemen adjourned to the smoking-room, where Colonel Devereux proposed cards. His host, however, would not hear of this. He was pleased beyond measure, he told himself, to have Colonel Devereux; it was not his intention, however, to let that worthy make his expenses while on board by winning money from his other guests. They therefore smoked and talked, poured out a modest libation on the shrine of Bacchus, and at half-past eleven retired to their state-rooms for the night.

When the voyagers woke next morning they discovered, by looking out of the port-holes of their comfortable cabins, that they had already arrived at Dieppe. The yacht was at anchor and lying as steady as a rock. In consequence the two elder ladies of the party were able to make their appearance at the breakfast-table, looking a little haggard perhaps, but ready, they declared, for any amusement that might be going forward. By a general concensus of opinion it was settled that they should go ashore as soon after breakfast as possible to explore the town, and if time permitted, to drive out to the historic old castle of Arques. This programme was carried out to every one's satisfaction, and when towards

evening they reached the yacht once more, it was with the feeling that, as tourists, they had certainly done their duty towards Dieppe.

"You will not sail at once, will you, Lord Dorset?" inquired Mrs. Bennett anxiously, as they ascended the accommodation-ladder to the deck.

"No," he replied, "we are going to give you a good night's rest. We shall get under way at daybreak, in order that we may reach Fécamp by breakfast-time. You can, therefore, make sure of sleeping well."

"I am so thankful," the good lady replied fervently. "Last night was too terrible."

That evening Stella's high spirits seemed to have deserted her. She declared that she was tired, but, if the truth were known, this was not the case. Once more she was a prey to the maddening jealousy that was her most unhappy characteristic. She could not but remember the fact that in the olden days she had imagined Reggie to be in love with pretty Miss Cranleigh, and that night she assured herself that he was wavering in his allegiance to herself. As a matter of fact he had been merely polite to Miss Cranleigh, but Stella had magnified all she saw until she could scarcely control her actions. On deck, perhaps with the object of making Reggie as miserable as herself, she entered upon a des-

perate flirtation with Colonel Devereux. Much to her chagrin Reggie appeared not to notice her behaviour, and, as may be supposed, this only added fuel to the consuming fire of jealousy within her. Never since he had known her had she shown herself in such a light. Their host, and also the other guests, noticed her behaviour, and poor Mrs. Bennett felt as if she were sitting on the edge of a volcano.

"What on earth is the matter with her?" said Lord Dorset to himself. "Has she suddenly gone mad? I wish I had never allowed that fellow Devereux to come with us. He's at the root of the trouble."

Still Reggie appeared not to notice his *fiancée's* behaviour. If she desired to flirt with the Colonel, he argued, she was quite at liberty to do so. He accordingly thought his own thoughts and smoked his cigar as peacefully as though she were not on board. Though he and Stella had been engaged such a short time, he was growing accustomed to her moods, and, according to his wont, was beginning to take them philosophically.

"What's the use of making a scene?" he muttered to himself. "It would do no sort of good. I have made my bed and now I must lay upon it." Then he added slowly, "Lord, what an ass I've been to be sure."

At ten o'clock Stella declared herself too tired to remain on deck.

"My head aches beyond all endurance," she declared to the company in general. "It's visiting those wretched ruins that has brought it on. I wonder why we bother ourselves about them?"

As no one answered her she bade them good-night, and started to walk along the deck towards the companion. Reggie rose from his chair and accompanied her. At the door she turned upon him.

"Good-night," she said. "Don't trouble to come with me. I can find my way quite well by myself. Go back to your friends. It would be selfish of me to keep you from them."

"No, Stella, I wish to come," he answered. "Can I get you anything before you retire?"

"Nothing at all, thank you," she replied coldly.

"Stella," said Reggie, laying his hand upon her arm and detaining her, "I can't for the life of me understand what is the matter with you to-night. That you are angry with me I can see, but why you should be so is more than I can understand."

"Indeed?" she answered. "You have less observation than I imagined. Perhaps it may

occur to you later. You need not come further. Good-night!"

She did not even give him her hand, but turning her back upon him went to her cabin without another word. Reggie was about to return to the deck to join the others, when he found that they were approaching the companion to come below.

"We ladies are going to follow Mrs. Dartrell's good example," said Mrs. Cranleigh, holding out her hand to him. "We intend having a good night's rest before the yacht commences to move."

"A very good idea," Reggie returned. "I don't think we can do better than follow your example."

As it happened, however, Colonel Devereux, who had some notion that there might be trouble in the wind, as far as he was concerned, was the only gentleman who sought his bed. Stukeley returned to the smoking-room, while Reggie and Lord Dorset found themselves aft at the taff-rail. Both were unusually silent. Lord Dorset, however, pulled at his cigar with a viciousness that seemed to suggest the fact that he had something on his mind.

"Look here, Reggie," he said at last, "I can't stand this sort of thing any longer. I am going to speak my mind plainly to you!"



The man he addressed did not look round. He was gazing fixedly at a fishing-vessel lying some fifty or sixty yards from them.

"What is it you want to speak to me about?" he inquired, without any apparent interest, for at the moment he was recalling a scene on the terrace at Weldersham.

"You'll admit that we've been friends a good many years," his lordship continued.

"I am perfectly willing to do so," Reggie answered. "What of it?"

"I have always understood that one of the privileges of friendship is the right to speak one's mind to a friend?"

"That all depends upon what you want to speak about," Reggie returned.

"It is about your engagement."

"Then we will not discuss it. It's a subject I don't care to speak about."

"But I must do so. It's making me more unhappy than I can say."

"I don't see why you should worry yourself about it. It's my affair, not yours."

"But you are my friend! Surely that counts for something?"

"It goes a long way in other matters. In this case, however, I can't see that the fact possesses any special value."

"But surely you don't mean to say that you

are going to deliberately condemn yourself to a life of unhappiness?"

Reggie looked at his companion for the first time during the conversation.

"I am afraid I do not grasp your meaning," he said. "Why should I be condemning myself to a life of unhappiness because I am going to marry Mrs. Dartrell?"

"I cannot exactly say why, but *you* know very well that you are," Lord Dorset replied. "I like Mrs. Dartrell very much! She is an exceedingly pretty woman and a splendid hostess!"

"Thanks!"

"She is also very accomplished and all that sort of thing. But, well, I'm not going to mince matters, whether I offend you or not; she's not the sort of woman you should have chosen for your wife."

"My dear old man," Reggie answered, "I am afraid I must decline to continue this discussion. You, of course, must see why. Let's drop it once and for all."

After this speech both men were silent for upwards of five minutes. The one thought that he had perhaps gone a little too far; while the other felt that the load he was already carrying had, for some reason or another, been suddenly doubled.

"Jimmy," said Reggie at last, for it must be confessed that it was by this name his lordship of Dorset was known to his more intimate companions, "you're a deuced good fellow, but you make mistakes. The fact is you haven't taken everything into consideration. Go your own way and don't worry yourself about me. I shall be all right."

"There, Reggie, you'll find that you are wrong," the other replied. "Good heavens! Why 'can't a man speak his mind out straight and fair without fear of treading too heavily upon other people's corns."

"Your metaphor's a bit mixed," said Reggie, "but that doesn't matter. I think I understand what you are driving at. Be assured, however, that I am not going into the affair with my eyes shut."

"I know exactly how you are going into it, and I don't care if I offend you by telling you. You were trapped into proposing to Mrs. Dartrell, and now you are too much of a man to back out. She won't let you go, because in her way she is fond of you; her chief reason, however, for wanting you to marry her is that she desires to be Countess of Weldersham. There you have the case in a nutshell."

"If that is so no more need be said," Reggie replied. "I know you mean well by me, old

man, but this conversation must not be repeated."

Lord Dorset muttered something about repeating it until he was black in the face, and then stated his intention of seeing the skipper before he turned in. He accordingly went forward, leaving his companion alone at the rails.

Into Reggie's thoughts for the next quarter of an hour we will not pry. That they were not happy, I have every reason to suppose.

"God help me," he muttered at last, as he prepared to go forward, "what a fool I have been. Poor little Dorothy! I believe that she loves me."

As he said this he made his way to his cabin with a heart as heavy as lead.

They left Dieppe shortly after daylight next morning, and reached the pretty little fishing-port of Fécamp shortly before breakfast-time. The attendance at that meal was not a large one. Mrs. Cranleigh and Mrs. Bennett preferred to take theirs in the solitude of their own cabins, while Stella's headache was still too bad to allow her to put in an appearance. In consequence Ella Cranleigh and the American cousin were the only ladies present, and for this reason all thought of shore going was abandoned for the time being. The morning was accordingly spent

in luxurious idleness on deck. Indeed it was not until nearly midday that the other ladies made their appearance. Stella was the first of the trio to reach the deck. She was dressed in a white flimsy fabric, draped with a quantity of lace. It gave her an ethereal look which was accentuated by her white face and dark, tired eyes. She declared that she had passed a terrible night, and when one looked at her it was quite possible to believe it. Her looks were so pathetic, and her manner so subdued and penitent, that even those who had felt angry with her on the previous night for the treatment of her lover, could not find it in their hearts to continue so.

"I am afraid your headache is still very bad," said Reggie, seating himself beside her and taking up her fan. "Is there anything I can do for it?"

"Only to forgive," she answered, her lips trembling. "I have been tearing my heart out all night in consequence of my treatment of you."

"Never mind that," he answered. "I of course could see that you were not yourself, and was more sorry for you than angry. I should have acted differently."

"You must not say that," she returned, "or I shall hate myself even more than I do now.

I would rather you were angry with me—much rather.”

“You may be sure I shall not be,” he replied. “I want you to look yourself once more.”

That afternoon Stella stated that she felt quite equal to accompanying them ashore, when they visited the old abbey, and explored the quaint streets, many of which dated back to the Thirteenth Century. By the time they reached the yacht once more all remembrance of the previous evening appeared to have been blotted out, and Stella was in a large measure her own self. They spent the evening on deck, and being tired after their ramble, retired to rest early.

For some reason Reggie was unable to sleep that night. His cabin, comfortable though it was, seemed suffocatingly hot. There was not a breath of air stirring. His conversation with Lord Dorset had haunted him continually all day. He would have given anything to have prevented it.

The yacht had been under way when he had retired to his cabin, for she was due at Cherbourg by breakfast-time. He heard the ship's bells chime eight, then one and two in the first watch. At last he began to feel a craving for fresh air, and unable to bear the oppression of the cabin, he determined to go on deck. He dressed himself, as he deemed it necessary, and

then passed through the saloon to the deck above. The fresh air was delightful. As he emerged from the companion a rattle of spray caught his cheek with a friendly smack. After wiping his face he went forward to the bridge. The chief mate had the watch and touched his hat respectfully to Reggie as he ascended the ladder.

"It's much better here than below," Reggie remarked. "The cabins are like ovens to-night."

"Let me find you a stool," said the other. "I have one in the wheel-house."

He went in search of it, and when he returned Reggie seated himself beside the rail and prepared for conversation.

"Lord Dorset was telling me," he began, "that you have had a somewhat extraordinary experience of the sea."

"I believe mine is stranger than that of most men," the other replied. "I've been at it all my life, that is to say, ever since I ran away from school at the age of fifteen. I have shipped on almost every variety of vessel, and I think I have set foot in most of the principal countries of the world. I have been a prisoner to a Pepper Rajah, came near losing my head with the Dyaks, was very nearly barbicued down in the Solomons, was stranded in Patagonia, was the

only man saved from the *William T. Waters* when she foundered off the Newfoundland banks, and was shot through the shoulder and nearly murdered when the crew of the *Siberian Prince* mutinied in the China Sea. Now here I am, after all that, chief mate of a five hundred ton yacht, taking pleasure trips in the Channel. Not that I have any fault to find with his lordship's service!"

"Life must be very pleasant in the South Seas," said Reggie meditatively.

"If you care for that sort of existence there's nothing better," the mate replied. "A beautiful climate, hot rolls from the bread-fruit trees, the pleasantest people in the whole world to deal with, and, if you want it, and possess a vessel, a change of scenery every dawn."

"And money-making?"

"Well, there's not so much in the South Sea trade as there used to be, but still one may make a good bit at it even now."

"It sounds attractive. If I had my time over again I might try it."

The mate laughed good-humouredly. It seemed to him rather a joke that popular Reginald Sandridge, should contemplate throwing up the life every one envied him, to try his luck among the South Sea Islands.

Half-an-hour later, Reggie having finished his



cigar, determined to return to his cabin, in order once more to woo the drowsy god. Bidding the mate good-night, he descended the ladder to the deck below, and made his way in the direction of the saloon companion. Before entering it he paused for a moment and looked out upon the sea. It was a lovely night; the moon had risen into a cloudless sky, and the yacht was cleaving her way through the water like a thing of life. Then, after one look round, he went below. According to custom, a light was still burning in the saloon. He was about to pass along in the direction of his cabin, when the sound of a door being opened attracted his attention. He looked round to discover who could be stirring at such an hour. As he did so he became aware of a white figure entering the saloon from one of the ladies' cabins. Only for one instant was he in doubt about the identity of the figure. *Then he realized that it was Stella.* Not wishing her to see him, he drew back into the shadow and watched her. She came hurriedly towards him, ringing her hands as if in intense mental agony, then, almost before he knew her intention, she had passed him and was hurrying up the companion to the deck above. This was more than he had bargained for, and he set off in pursuit. As she passed him he had been unable to tell whether she was asleep or awake. And what



"She had thrown herself into the water below.



was she going to do? When he reached the deck she was hurrying aft. As he passed Lord Dorset's cabin he threw open the door and shouted to his friend to come quickly to his assistance. Then he ran towards the taff-rail. He was too late, however. Before he could reach her, Stella had climbed upon the grating to the rail, and with one wild cry, without even looking back she had thrown herself into the water below. Slipping off his coat, Reggie, in his turn, sprang upon the rail. He could see nothing of her, but he would at least make an attempt to find her. A moment later he was in the water. When he rose to the surface he looked about him. The yacht was already some distance from him, but no sign of Stella could he discover. He swam on and on, but without success. In his school-days he had been famous for his prowess in the water, but even his strength could not last for ever. Little by little he found it giving way. His limbs moved as though they were of lead, and he realized that unless help came quickly his race was run. At last he could no longer keep up the struggle; consciousness left him, and he abandoned himself to his fate!

## CHAPTER VII

It would be impossible for me to picture the grief and consternation of those on board the *Wandering Minstrel*. The cries for help, the sudden stoppage of the yacht, and the commotion on board, had woke every one. The gentlemen of the party hastened to the deck, while the ladies crowded into the saloon, asking each other in terrified tones what had happened. When they were informed they stared at each other with horror-stricken faces as if they refused to believe it. Yet, alas! it was only too true. Half-an-hour went by in anxious suspense, and then the boat with Lord Dorset and the chief mate aboard was seen returning.

“What news?” cried Sir George, who constituted himself spokesman for the party. “What news?”

“God help us, none!” groaned the owner of the yacht. “We have searched everywhere, but not a trace of either Reggie or Mrs. Dartrell can we find.”

When the boat was alongside he came up the ladder and ascended to the deck. Stukeley remarked afterwards to his friends that he looked quite ten years older.

"I cannot believe it," he said; and then repeated, "I cannot believe it!"

"We had better keep the sad news from the ladies until the morning," remarked Lord Dorset. "There is nothing to be gained by telling it to them to-night."

"I am afraid you will have to do so," replied Sir George. "They heard the commotion on deck, and are in the saloon now, half frightened out of their lives."

"In that case I suppose there is nothing for it but to do so," answered Lord Dorset.

They accordingly went below and told their tale, whereupon Mrs. Bennett fainted away. The gentlemen then returned to the smoking-room to take council together.

It was finally agreed that they should return to England with as little delay as possible, in order that the terrible intelligence might be conveyed to Reggie's relatives at once. Mrs. Dartrell, as far as they were aware, had no relations save the American cousin, Miss Morrison. Accordingly the yacht's head was put about and the course was set for Southampton, where they arrived shortly after luncheon on that day.

It was arranged that Sir George, the Colonel, and little Stukeley should escort the ladies to London, while their host made his way to Weldersham to break the sad intelligence to the family there.

It was therefore eight o'clock in the evening before he reached the castle. The fly pulled up at the door, and having mounted the steps he rang the bell. The butler recognized him immediately, for he had often stayed at the castle when Reggie was there.

"Somes," he said, "before I see any one else I should like to have a few moments' conversation with you."

"Certainly, my lord, but I hope there is nothing the matter?"

"I am sorry to say that there is something very much the matter," the other replied. "But don't let us stand talking here. Take me somewhere where we can be alone and without fear of interruption."

"If your lordship will please to step into the library," said the old man, "I don't think any one will come in there."

Lord Dorset followed him to the room in question, and the door was closed behind them. Then Lord Dorset told his tale to his horrified listener.

"God bless us, sir," exclaimed the old man,

when the other had finished, "this is indeed terrible news! Master Reggie drowned! It don't seem possible. It was only the other day he was down here!"

"God knows I would have given all I possess in the world," cried his lordship, "to have prevented it! You know that, *Somes*!"

"I do, my lord, and no one could wonder at it! Oh dear, oh dear! this is too terrible!"

The honest old man was genuinely grieved.

"How is Lord Weldersham?" asked Lord Dorset at last.

"Better than he was, my lord, but still very weak. It's not for me to repeat such things, but do you know that he cut Master Reggie out of his will the other day?"

"I heard something about it," the other replied. "They quarrelled over Mr. Sandridge's engagement, did they not?"

"I believe that was the fact of the case, sir," said the butler. "And now he's died through trying to save her! Oh dear me!"

"Well, *Somes*, what do you think I had better do? Shall I see Mrs. Maddison and break the news to her first, and let her tell the Earl, or see his lordship myself?"

It was finally agreed that Lord Dorset should go to Mrs. Maddison, whereupon *Somes* departed to the drawing-room. A few minutes later he



returned and invited Lord Dorset to follow him. He found Mrs. Maddison alone. She was genuinely surprised to see him, and shocked beyond measure when she heard the reason of his visit.

"I thought it best to come straight here and tell you myself, before you could hear it from the newspapers," he said, after they had shaken hands. "His uncle must be told, but who is to do it?"

Lord Dorset offered to undertake this task, but Mrs. Maddison decided that it would be better for her to do so.

"I will consult the doctor, who is with him now, and see what he says. Will you excuse me?"

She thereupon left the room and went upstairs, and the young man was free to amuse himself as best he could. He crossed the room to a table on which stood a photograph of his dead friend. It was what is called a speaking likeness, and as he looked at it he thought of Reggie as he had known him—so brave and generous, so loyal a friend—beloved by every one with whom he came in contact.

"God knows I would have given my life for you, old dad," he muttered to the photograph. Then he recalled their friendship at Eton and at the University, their long walking tour on the

Continent together, their many yachting trips, and the every-day companionship that is more than brotherliness. And now it was all over, and Reggie had gone out of his life for ever. He was by no means an emotional young man, but he found it necessary at this point to wipe his eyes and blow his nose violently.

A moment later the door was opened, and turning, he found himself face to face with Dorothy. Her face was white to the lips.

"Lord Dorset," she said in a husky voice, "you have brought us terrible news. Do you mean to say that Mrs. Dartrell threw herself overboard, and that Reggie lost his life in trying to save hers? I am going to ask you to tell me all about it."

"So far as I can say that is what happened," he answered. "It could be the only reason. But are you sure it will not pain you too much to hear all the details?"

"No, tell me everything," she replied, sinking into a chair. "Remember, he and I were more like brother and sister."

"It appears that between twelve and one o'clock, not being able to sleep, Reggie made his way up to the bridge of the yacht and sat there talking to the chief mate for upwards of an hour. Then, with a remark that he hoped to be able to sleep when he reached his cabin, he left the

bridge and made his way below. He had not gone five minutes before the mate, on chancing to look aft, saw a white figure running swiftly towards the stern. A moment later Reggie issued from the companion in pursuit. As he passed my cabin, which is on the deck, he opened the door and called to me for help. Half asleep and half awake I sprang up, but was too late to see what happened. The mate, however, told me that Mrs. Dartrell sprang on to the rail and from it into the sea before Reggie could catch her. Throwing off his coat, Reggie in his turn leaped into the water. The yacht was stopped immediately and a boat was lowered. I went in it with the mate, and we searched for half-an-hour, but without success. Both Mrs. Dartrell and your cousin had disappeared!"

Dorothy did not reply. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them.

"Miss Maddison," said Lord Dorset at last, "you know what friends Reggie and I were?"

"Yes, I know it," she answered, as if she were forcing herself to speak. "I know what friends you were!" Then, after a pause, she continued, "Will you forgive me if I leave you?"

She rose and offered him her hand, which he took. And then without another word she left the room.

"She loves him," said Lord Dorset to himself, "and I am certain he loved her with his whole heart. Oh, why did he have anything to do with the other woman!" But then, thinking he had perhaps been unjust to the dead, he muttered, "Poor Stella!"

Ten minutes later Mrs. Maddison returned to the room.

"My uncle would like to see you, Lord Dorset, if you will kindly go up to his room," she said. "Your news has been a terrible blow to him! May I take you to him?"

He followed Mrs. Maddison from the room to the chamber of the old peer.

"Good-evening, Lord Dorset," said the old man, when his nephew's friend was ushered into the room. "This is indeed sad news you bring us, but I thank you for your kindness in coming to tell us yourself. My niece, Mrs. Maddison, has related the facts of this regrettable occurrence as nearly as she knows them. But may I ask you for further particulars?"

Once more the young man told his tale. When he had finished, Lord Weldersham moved the coverlet of his bed with trembling hands.

"Perhaps my nephew informed you that when we last met we did not part the best of friends?" he asked.

"I understood that you objected to his

marriage with Mrs. Dartrell," said the other. "But I have never heard Reggie speak of you save with the utmost affection. I happen to know that he was sincerely attached to you, sir!"

"I am glad to hear that," the old gentleman answered. "I may say I had a premonition that he would never marry the lady whose friendship cost him his life. But there—it is scarcely necessary to discuss that matter now, is it?"

"Alas, no!"

His lordship asked a few more questions, and then gave orders that a room should be prepared for Lord Dorset to remain at the castle for the night.

The young man, however, thanked him, but declined. It was necessary for him to get back to London as soon as possible, he said.

He thereupon bade the Earl good-bye, and Mrs. Maddison conducted him down-stairs. Dorothy he did not see again before he left the house.

When he had gone the old Earl bade them bring him the last portrait of his dead nephew. He looked at it long and earnestly, and then placed it in the bed beside him. At midnight his nurse gave him his medicine, and then retired to the adjoining room. When she

returned again at one o'clock it was to find the old man dead, with Reggie's portrait tightly clasped in his withered old hand. He had felt his loss more keenly than those about him had imagined.

Though he did not know it, Richard Victor Sandridge was now eighth Earl of Weldersham.

## CHAPTER VIII

ON the morning following Lord Dorset's visit to Weldersham, Richard Sandridge came down to his breakfast in his chambers at the Temple in a very poor temper. He had passed a bad night, and, as all of you know, this is not a good argument for the next day. A few weeks before he had invested some money in a certain stock, which he had now every reason to suppose would not prove as successful as his brokers had assured him it would do. What was more, a certain well-known barrister had on the previous evening uttered a witticism concerning him, which, though meant in good part, had rankled in his mind all night long, as a remark of that kind always does with a man of small spirit, who cannot help believing that the world in general thinks him to be the sort of person it twits him to be in jest. As I have said elsewhere, he was small and insignificant. All the good looks of the family seemed to have been centred in the Earl and Reggie. Yet Richard was invariably

scrupulously dressed, his complexion was pink and white, his hair always well-brushed, his nails trimmed to a nicety, while his small moustache and beard were so carefully looked after that it seemed as if no hair could ever get out of place.

Entering his sitting-room he sat down to his breakfast. A morning paper, carefully cut and folded, lay beside his plate. He lifted the cover of the dish before him and discovered four attenuated kidneys.

"The third time this week," he muttered savagely to himself, as he plunged his fork into the viands. "Colonial kidneys at English prices! This is too much! And yet they expect one to support the Empire!"

He poured out his coffee with the air of a man who has been defrauded of his birthright, ate a few mouthfuls of the despised kidneys, buttered his toast as if he were cutting a certain individual's throat, and then, opening his paper, turned to the money market. His stock was down, of course; he could expect nothing more, it was his usual luck! Nothing he ever laid his hand to prospered. There was never a man who had such luck! Why had he ever believed Peter Brown when he had advised him to buy the stock? It took another kidney to decide this question, and the result was by no means a happy one. From the money



market he turned to the European telegrams by way of relief, but these did not interest him at all. What did he care about the Balkan question? What did it matter to him if Russia were in treaty with Serbia? Russia, France, and Spain might combine to upset the European concert, and it would not have troubled him in the least. He turned then to the front pages and read the Death notices. None of his enemies were dead; nor had he a friend among those whose marriages were set forth; the Births notices he did not trouble to scan. He then turned to the next page. He skipped the Literary and Sporting news, hastily turned the page on the Parliamentary Intelligence, and found himself confronted with a sheet of general news. Then a heading caught his eye and caused him to utter an exclamation of surprise. The paragraph in question extended to a bare half-column, and was headed as follows—

## YACHTING MISADVENTURE.

### DEATH OF MR. REGINALD SANDRIDGE

“Good heavens!” he muttered to himself, and then bent over the page. Scarcely able to realize the magnitude of the news he read on, and when he had finished the account, drew a long breath.

Then he sat back in his chair and gazed straight before him for some minutes in silence.

"Reggie dead?" he muttered at last, and then repeated the words—"Reggie dead!"

Even after he had read the newspaper account twice more, he could not grasp the situation. It could not possibly be true! The last time he had seen Reggie he had been all health and vigour. He was the last man in the world to die! It must be some mistake on the part of the newspaper, he told himself—and yet, newspapers, in such matters as this, were not accustomed to be mendacious. Then he took the paper up again, and read the paragraph once more, very carefully and judiciously. Reginald Sandridge had met his death in the English Channel between the port of Fécamp and Cherbourg. He had jumped overboard to save a lady's life, and had lost his own in the attempt.

Throwing the paper upon the table, Richard rose from his chair, and went to the window. Something that very closely resembled a steam-hammer was beating in his head until he felt quite dizzy. After a while he returned to his chair by the table and read the paragraph again. His sense of judgment was slowly returning to him. The account was most circumstantial, and was confirmed by those who had been on board the yacht at the time. Then he sat down and

rested his head on his hands. He was beginning to understand what Reggie's death meant for him. If the latter were really dead, then he, Richard the despised, was undoubtedly the heir to the Earldom of Weldersham and the estates. There could be no disputing that fact, even had any one desired to do so. The thought was almost overwhelming in its grandeur and possibilities. He had often dreamt of such a thing, but had never thought that it would come to pass. For the moment he scarcely knew what to do with himself. He dared not speak of the occurrence to any one for fear there might be a mistake. Once a sickening fear swept over him. His uncle was still alive and might live for some years to come. He remembered the last interview he had had, some years ago, with the old gentleman, and the uncomplimentary things the other had said to him. He knew that the Earl had something that was very near akin to a loathing for him, for the reason that he was not a follower of all the sports which delighted his (the Earl's) heart. From his uncle his thoughts turned to Mrs. Maddison and Dorothy. He remembered how the latter had taunted him and ridiculed him once at a meet of the hounds for sitting his horse like a village farmer. When the time came he vowed in his heart that he would not fail to remember this fact, and would then

retaliate. He was not the sort of individual who ever forgave or forgot an injury. Power, to his way of thinking, meant being able to inflict pain. Those laugh best who laugh last, he was in the habit of saying, and he fully intended to be the last humourist. He prided himself always upon looking at matters from a business point of view. Mrs. Maddison and her daughter had had a long innings—now he was going to have his! Then he returned to the breakfast-table.

With the instinct of economy he endeavoured to finish his meal. There was still one kidney left, and he knew that if it were taken away he would never see it again, and he could not afford to waste anything. He had schooled himself to this sort of meanness little by little, and even in a moment of unlooked-for prosperity he was slow to cast it off.

The kidney finished he went into his bedroom and put on his boots. As he did so, the remembrance of the biting speech that had been made to him on the previous evening recurred to him.

“If I know anything of them, and human nature in general,” he said to himself, “they’ll tell a different tale now. There is all the difference in the world between Richard Sandridge, the briefless barrister, and Richard Sandridge, the heir to the Earl of Weldersham.”

When he had finished dressing and returned

to the sitting-room, he found a telegram upon the table for him. With trembling hands he tore it open and scanned the contents. It was from Mrs. Maddison, and contained news even more surprising than that he had already read. It ran as follows—

“Your uncle, the Earl, died early this morning—come at once.”

He smoothed the paper out, and then, scarcely conscious of his actions, he turned once more to the window.

“So the old man is dead?” he said to himself. “And I am the Earl of Weldersham!”

He had no pity for the man whose race was run, and felt no sorrow for the strong young life that had been cut off in its prime. They had had their turn, and now he meant to have his, and to make the most of his advantages.

At last the novelty of his position began to wear off a little. It was then that he realized the fact that he was the inheritor of grave responsibilities.

He read his cousin's telegram once more, and then went in search of a Bradshaw. It behoved him to reach Weldersham with as little delay as possible.

“Who knows,” he said to himself, suspiciously,

"what may go on in the meantime if I am not there?"

He discovered that there was a train leaving London at 10.15, and by this he determined to travel. He looked at the clothes he was wearing, and then retired to his bedroom once more. When he reappeared he was in mourning. What was more, an idea had occurred to him, and on it he resolved to act. It had always been his rule to breakfast early, and by nine o'clock a fast cab had taken him to Berkeley Square. He made his way up the steps of the residence of the Earl of Dorset, and rang the bell. The door was opened to him by a footman, who seemed to resent the intrusion of such an early call.

"Is Lord Dorset at home?" Richard inquired.

"Yes, his lordship returned late last night," the man replied.

"He is not up yet, I suppose?"

"His valet has just gone up to him, sir."

"Be so good as to send up my card, and ask him if he could spare me a few minutes on most important business?"

The servant glanced at the card and his manner changed.

"Will you be so good as to step inside, sir, and I'll take up your card myself."

Richard was forthwith conducted to the

library, a stately apartment overlooking the street. Five minutes later the man returned with the message that his master would come down as quickly as possible. Once more Richard was left alone. Even now he found a great difficulty in keeping calm. And indeed it was scarcely to be wondered at, seeing that the whole prospect of his life had been changed for him in something less than half-an-hour.

"Eighth Earl of Weldersham and an enormous fortune!"

The words rang in his brain like a peal of bells. Then a thought came over him. What if there should be any mistake about Reggie's death. But no, there could not be any doubt of its being true. The newspaper account was too circumstantial for that! Then the door opened and Lord Dorset entered the room.

"Good-morning, Mr. Sandridge," he said, gravely holding out his hand to the other. "I am sorry to have kept you waiting. Won't you sit down? You have heard the sad news, of course?"

"I saw it in the paper this morning," Richard replied, "and came on here at once to see you about it."

"I can scarcely believe it yet," said his lordship. "It has made me feel like an old man!"

"You would naturally be very much distressed," said Richard. "I suppose there is not the least doubt that my cousin is drowned?"

He asked the question so eagerly that Lord Dorset glanced at him suspiciously.

"Not the least doubt, I am afraid," he replied. "Both your cousin and Mrs. Dartrell must have perished."

"You would of course be prepared to swear an affidavit to that effect?"

"If such a thing were necessary I should do so."

"It would make it more legal. It is my experience that one cannot be too careful in these matters."

"Ah!" said his lordship. "I think I understand. Of course my poor friend's death will make a great difference in your prospects. I had forgotten that!"

Richard was a little troubled in his mind. He feared that he had shown his hand too openly.

"I hope you do not think that I am thinking of myself alone," he hastened to add. "There are others to be considered."

This was only a figure of speech, for until that moment the thought of any one else had not entered into his calculations.

"Mrs. Maddison and her daughter," the other



continued, "were overwhelmed by the sad news. As also was your uncle."

"May I ask how you knew this?" asked Richard.

"Because I was at Weldersham last evening," Lord Dorset replied. "I went down there directly I landed to break the news of Reggie's death."

"Then I suppose you were there when my uncle died?"

The other uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"When your uncle died?" he cried incredulously. "What do you mean?"

"My uncle died during the night," Richard continued. "I had a telegram from my cousin this morning, and I am going down to Weldersham by the 10.15 train to take over the management of affairs."

"The Earl dead! The Earl dead!" his lordship muttered to himself. It seemed impossible, weak though the old man had been on the previous night. Then he added, "He must have loved him after all!"

There was a somewhat lengthy silence; then Richard rose to take his leave.

"I am deeply indebted to you for your courtesy," he said. "I would not have disturbed you at such an early hour had I not been anxious

to obtain full particulars. The shock has been a terribly sudden one."

Lord Dorset escorted him to the front door, where he bade him good-bye.

"I always disliked the fellow," he said to himself as he made his way to the breakfast-room, "and I think I dislike him more than ever now! It's as much as he can do to conceal his delight at the change in his prospects!"

Meanwhile Richard was speeding along towards Euston Station.

"Wait till I get firmly seated," he muttered to himself, "and then I'll cut Dorset as I would a common cad. He hates me, because he thinks I am taking Reggie's place!"

Arriving at Euston he purchased two or three daily papers, took a second-class ticket, and sat himself down in the corner of a carriage to see what other accounts were given of the catastrophe in the Channel. It seemed almost like a reproach to himself that every paper should go out of its way to comment on the popularity of the dead man.

"It's easy enough to be popular," he said viciously, "provided you have plenty of money and are willing to spend it like water! That will not be my way of going on, however!"

There he was right! It would not! Richard could not remember ever having spent a penny

in his life for which he did not receive full value.

When the train reached Weldersham Station Richard alighted and gave up his ticket to the station master, who raised his hat obsequiously. He had been talking to the carriage-groom from the castle only a few minutes before, and had been warned by him of the arrival of the new Earl.

Richard would certainly not have been pleased or edified had he heard the remark the latter had given utterance to concerning him. They all knew Reggie, and he had been every one's favourite, but of himself they knew next to nothing, and what was more, what they had heard was not complimentary.

Richard entered the brougham, and when the groom had mounted to the box they set off for the castle.

It was with a thrill of the pride of ownership that he passed in through the great gates, and up the long avenue towards the stately pile of buildings on the river's bank. He could see the deer basking among the bracken, the long sweep of turf leading up to the woodland on the hill, and the rabbits darting hither and thither in the underwood. Then the carriage turned in at the second gate and finally pulled up at the front door. The footman opened the carriage-door,

and he entered the house to be received by Somes. After the brilliant sunshine outside, the old hall, with its stained-glass windows, was beautifully cool and shady.

"Perhaps you would like to see Mrs. Maddison first, sir?" said Somes.

"Yes, I think it would be as well," Richard replied. "Where is she?"

"In her boudoir, sir," the man answered. "If you will step this way I will take you to her."

So saying he led the heir towards the door at the end of the hall.

"Mr. Sandridge, madam," he said, and Richard walked past him into the room.

Mrs. Maddison had been writing at a table in the window, but on hearing this announcement she rose to greet the new-comer.

"It is kind of you, Richard, to come down so quickly," she said, giving him her hand. "My telegram must have been a great shock to you!"

"It was indeed," replied Richard, with a solemn shake of the head. "I hastened away as soon as I received it. When did it take place?"

"Between twelve and one o'clock," Mrs. Maddison answered, and then gave him full particulars, winding up with, "Poor Reggie's death was a great blow to him. We found him with his portrait tightly clasped in his hand."

A few moments later Dorothy entered the room. She was dressed entirely in black, which served to heighten the pallor of her complexion. She looked as if happiness had departed from her life for ever. She gave her hand to Richard and bade him welcome, and a few minutes later they went in to lunch, a dismal meal eaten almost in silence.

This was scarcely finished before Mr. Margetson, the Earl's solicitor, arrived. Richard received him in the dead man's study. The importance of his new position was gradually growing upon him.

"Good-day, Mr. Margetson," he said. "It is some years since last we met, and we do so now under peculiarly sad circumstances!"

"Sad, indeed!" replied the lawyer. "It is hard to realize that both your uncle and your cousin have been taken from us. I had hoped his lordship was on the high road to recovery. The terrible news of Mr. Reginald's death must have precipitated matters!"

"I suppose so," said Richard dryly.

If the truth must be told, he was growing a little tired of these constant references to Reggie. He had known the news for some hours now, and yet not one single person had offered him any sort of congratulation on his accession to his new honours.

"May I ask," continued the lawyer, "whether you happen to be aware of the state of your uncle's will?"

"I know nothing whatsoever about it," the other replied. "I was not one of those who pandered to my uncle. I knew that my cousin was his favourite nephew, and in consequence I did not expect to receive anything from him."

"You will be surprised then to learn that his lordship had to all intents and purposes disinherited Mr. Reginald."

This state of affairs certainly was a surprise to Richard. He looked at the lawyer anxiously.

"Then to whom was my uncle's private wealth to pass?" he inquired.

The lawyer placed the tips of his fingers together and looked at the young man over them.

"You would have received ten thousand pounds," he said. "Mrs. Maddison another ten thousand, and your cousin Dorothy the same sum. There were a number of legacies to the servants and tenantry, with a thousand pounds to myself. The remainder was to be distributed between various hospitals and public institutions."

Richard was horrified, and would like to have declared it to be a most unjust will, but he

wisely remembered himself in time and held his tongue.

"And that is how it stands now?" he said, with the hope of drawing the other out.

"Not at all," replied the lawyer. "The day before yesterday your uncle relented, sent for me, and revoked his last will, allowing the first to stand. Had Mr. Reginald lived he would have been the possessor of the title and estates, with an income of between thirty and forty thousand pounds a year. Therefore, when the necessary formalities connected with your cousin's death have been accomplished, you will be the Earl of Weldersham, and the possessor of the money and estates.

This was indeed good news for Richard. His self-confidence returned to him at once.

"And the other charges on the estate are?"

"The amounts previously mentioned. Ten thousand pounds for Mrs. Maddison, and a like sum for her daughter. The benefits to the servants and tenantry, and the legacy to myself."

"And what is the total amount?"

"Including everything, I suppose it will amount to about thirty thousand pounds."

Richard felt that his uncle might have been a little less generous. Large as his inheritance was, thirty thousand pounds was a considerable sum to take out of it; well invested it would

have amounted to an income of something like twelve hundred pounds per annum. Once more, however, he deemed it better to hold his tongue.

"I understand that the funeral will take place next Thursday," he observed after a few minutes' pause. "I shall stay here to-night and return to Town to-morrow. I think you know my address, in case you should have need to communicate with me."

The lawyer remarked that he was quite familiar with it.

"In the meantime," he said, "it would be as well that we should go through your uncle's papers together."

To this Richard assented, and they thereupon set to work. The overhauling of the drawers of the writing-table, and those of the massive cabinet standing beside the window, resulted in no discovery of any importance. The dead man had been most methodical in his habits, and such papers as were found amounted only to letters from some of his particular friends, his correspondence with his agent, a book of private and charitable disbursements, a packet of faded letters tied with an old blue ribbon, and upwards of twenty volumes of a diary, which he had long since failed to enter up. These, with a few odds and ends, made up the sum total of the drawer. Taken altogether, it was a very fair



epitome of the man's life. Neat, methodical, unostentatious, and yet carrying with it the dignity of a mind well versed in business affairs.

Half-an-hour later Mr. Margetson rose to leave, but before he went Richard took him on one side.

"Mr. Margetson," he said, "you and yours have acted for the family for many generations, and I conclude that you will do so still."

When the old lawyer had stated his willingness to use his best endeavours on Richard's behalf, he left the castle, and Richard made his way to Mrs. Maddison's boudoir. There he found Dorothy endeavouring to interest herself in a book. There was still the same look of dumb despair in her face, and as he glanced at her Richard wondered for whom she was grieving the more, her uncle or her cousin. He fancied, however, that he could make a very good guess.

"Will you come for a little walk round the place with me, Dorothy?" he inquired. "I am sure it will do you good."

"If you wish it," she answered, and rising meekly from her seat went out to put on her hat.

In the meantime Richard was busy with his own thoughts. He recalled what Mr. Margetson had told him, and rejoiced that such good fortune should have come his way, when he least ex-

pected it. Only yesterday he had imagined himself a mere nonentity, one who might gaze upon the throne from afar, but who would never have a chance of sitting on it. Now he was to all intents and purposes a peer of Great Britain, with a magnificent rent roll, with as many residences as you could count upon the fingers of your hand. He stood at the window and looked out at the fair scene stretched out before him. It was hard to realize every yard and acre of it was his. And yesterday his territorial possessions amounted to no more than the earth contained in the four flower-pots outside his chamber window in the Temple.

"I can scarcely believe it is all mine," he muttered to himself. "It must be very valuable now, but it won't be my fault if I don't manage to make it worth double before I've done with it."

And those who knew him would be inclined to agree with him in this assertion.

Presently Dorothy appeared, and they left the house together. They walked through the rose garden, and then crossed the lawn and passed out into the park by the little gate at the further end. When they had climbed the hillside, they seated themselves on a bench that the late Earl had had placed there for the convenience of those desirous of enjoying the view

of the surrounding country. Below them was the old grey castle, with the river circling round it; in a break in the woods behind them the thatched roofs of the village could be seen, while to the left of the castle one could see right up the valley as far as the old Minster town of Weldersham. Richard drank it all in with never-ending delight. It was not the beauty of the scene, however, which enchanted him so much, but the sense of possession, the feeling that for his lifetime it was his, and that no one could take it from him.

"I had no idea it was so beautiful," he said to his cousin, who was looking down with swimming eyes on the scene that she loved so well.

"You never saw very much of it, did you?" she answered.

Her speech was a most unfortunate one. It reminded Richard that he had never been popular with his uncle, and in consequence had only been invited to the castle on very rare occasions.

"I don't think my uncle quite understood me," he replied. "At any rate we were never as friendly as I could have wished we might have been."

Dorothy remembered certain things she had heard the late Earl say concerning the man beside her, and they did not add to her liking

for him. Unfortunately for Richard, he carried his character in his face.

"It has always been one of my greatest regrets that my uncle should have taken such an unreasonable dislike to me. I fancy he sometimes forgot that the same blood that ran in his veins also ran in mine. It was all very well for some people to cow-tow to him for the sake of what he could leave them, but I never was one of that sort. As he did not seem to want me I held aloof from him, and as you see, Fate has rewarded me!"

For the first time that day Dorothy's face flushed, and she turned round and said sharply—

"If you mean to insinuate by that that Reggie 'cow-towed,' as you call it, to his uncle for the sake of his money, all I can say is, that you do him a deliberate injustice. It is shameful that you should dare to say such things of a dead man!"

"I mentioned no names," replied Richard cunningly.

"But I know what was in your mind," she retorted. "I am aware that you have always been jealous of Reggie. From the very first you disliked him, because he was your uncle's favourite and the heir to the title and the estates. You might at least spare him—now that he is dead!"

"I have no desire to speak ill of the dead," Richard answered.

"I don't believe he is dead!" cried Dorothy passionately.

Richard gazed at her in some alarm.

"Not dead!" he exclaimed, as if in expostulation. "But he must be. I saw Lord Dorset this morning before I came down, and he assured me positively that he was drowned. They searched for half-an-hour in a boat, but could find no trace of him. Of course he's drowned. I don't see how he could have escaped."

Dorothy regarded him with withering scorn.

"You certainly seem very anxious to be sure of his decease," she said. "You are afraid of losing the estates, I presume?"

This shaft struck home on a guilty conscience.

"You are very unjust to me," he answered. "You know very well that I think nothing of the kind. No one would be more genuinely delighted than myself should Reggie be still alive! Still, we have to look facts in the face—my legal training has taught me that!"

Dorothy glanced at her watch, but did not make any reply to his last speech.

"We had better be getting back again," she said, as if to end the discussion. "It is nearly seven o'clock, and it is time we dressed for dinner."

They rose from the seat and began their descent of the hill. The return journey to the castle was walked almost in silence.

When Richard dressed for dinner that evening there were two matters that caused him considerable uneasiness. In the first place he remembered, when it was too late, that he had sent Mr. Margetson away that afternoon, without offering him tea or refreshment of any sort, and secondly that he had quarrelled with Dorothy over Reggie. Looked at in any light, neither of them were very important circumstances, yet Richard felt that he had been lacking in tact.

"It is little things like that that set people against one," he murmured to his hair-brush. "I must try to make it right with them later on."

This plan he endeavoured to carry out, with what success time will show. He spent the greater part of the evening in the late Earl's study, overhauling the papers they had discovered that afternoon. At ten o'clock he returned to the drawing-room to find Mrs. Maddison alone.

"Where is Dorothy?" he inquired.

"On the terrace," replied her mother. "She found the room a little too hot, so went outside."

Richard strolled out through the window in search of her. It was still light enough for him to be able to distinguish a tall dark figure walk-

ing slowly along in the direction of the bridge. He followed her with the intention of making his peace with her.

"You find it cooler out here, I suppose?" he began in his most conciliatory tone as he joined her.

"Much cooler," she answered, and then added, as a hint to him that she had no great desire for his company, "the quiet is delightful."

They stood beside the stone parapet, looking down at the water very much as she and Reggie had done only such a short time before.

"Dorothy," said Richard at last, "I am afraid you are still angry with me for what I said this afternoon. You really should not be. I am sure I did not want to hurt your feelings. I knew that you were always fond of Reggie; of course, there is no reason why you shouldn't have been. Only I thought that when he became engaged to Mrs. Dartrell, you——" Here he paused and looked at her. Dorothy drew herself up to her full height.

"Richard," she exclaimed, "if you dare to speak to me again like that, I'll never forgive you."

Then she turned on her heel and walked quickly towards the house.

"What a little spitfire!" said the young man to himself. "It looks very much as if I've made

matters worse instead of better! Well, it can't be helped!"

He lingered on the terrace for upwards of ten minutes, and then returned to the drawing-room, to find that Dorothy had said good-night to her mother, and had gone to her room.

"You must forgive the poor child, Richard," continued Mrs. Maddison. "She has felt the sad events of the past two days even more, I fancy, than any of us. She was very much attached to her cousin. They have always been so much together."

"She shall pay for the way she has treated me," muttered Richard to himself that night before he retired. "So she thinks he's not dead, does she?"

When he fell asleep it was to dream that Dorothy's prophecy had come true, and that Reggie had returned to life to ask him to render an account of his stewardship.



## CHAPTER IX

THE funeral of the seventh Earl of Weldersham was an unpretentious affair. He was laid to his rest in the family vault at the eastern end of the village church. Richard, by virtue of his position, was chief mourner; and half-a-dozen or so of his brother peers attended, and perhaps a dozen friends and distant relatives, a few of whom returned to the castle afterwards. Mr. Margetson, who was of the old school, suggested to Richard that the will should be read in the dining-room, as had been done in former instances. Believing that it would put him right with the family and neighbourhood, Richard was by no means loath to give his consent, and accordingly that momentous document was produced and expounded. Such of the distant relatives as were mentioned in it were pleased at their good fortune, while the remainder endeavoured as far as was possible to conceal their disappointment.

“Fancy Richard Sandridge Earl of Welder-

sham—with thirty thousand a year,” said one of the men. “What has the miserable little beggar done to deserve such luck? He’ll never keep up the dignity of the place or the Name, and I know as well as if he told me, that, even with all this money, if I were to ask him for the loan of a ten-pound note he would refuse it. If it had been Reggie now, matters would have been very different.”

Neither Mrs. Maddison nor Dorothy were present at the reading of the will. Mr. Margetson had already informed them of the extent to which they would benefit, and they had no desire to exhibit themselves to the gaze of those who would be unable to realize the extent and depth of their grief.

When the rest of the party had left the castle, and Richard found himself alone with his solicitor, he invited that gentleman to accompany him to the library.

“I want you to tell me,” he began, when they had seated themselves there, “exactly how the estate stands. What the various farms are bringing in, and what class of tenants I have.”

To the worthy old lawyer this haste to enter upon business seemed almost indecent. The old Earl had not been in his grave three hours before

his successor was beginning to calculate what the estates were worth to him.

"Would it not be better," he suggested, "to postpone this discussion for a few days? I shall be able to go into the matter more fully with you then."

"Not at all," said Richard brusquely. "I understand that you have the whole matter at your fingers' ends. There is nothing to be gained by delay. I am most anxious to know exactly how my affairs are. As a matter of fact, I have asked Mr. Collins, the estate agent, to be here at six o'clock; it is now a quarter past."

He rang the bell and inquired whether Mr. Collins had arrived, and on being answered in the affirmative, bade the butler show him in. A few moments later a tall, burly, farmerish-looking man made his appearance.

"Good-afternoon, Mr. Collins," said Richard, "be good enough to sit down. Mr. Margetson and I are having a discussion with regard to the estate, and I thought we could not do better than invite you to join our council."

The agent looked at the lawyer, who was carefully scrutinizing the toe of his right boot. It was evident he did not feel equal to meeting the other's gaze.

"I shall be glad to give you any information that is in my power, my lord," replied the agent. "I have served his late lordship for thirty-five years, as Mr. Margetson will tell you."

"I know all about that," answered Richard. "I have been told that you have always given satisfaction, I hope you always may."

"I shall do my best," the other replied, but with no great heartiness.

A discussion then commenced concerning the value of the different farms and the characters of the tenants. On the whole it was satisfactory, but there were two or three items to which Richard took exception. One Jacob Webster, of Knolle Tree Farm, was considerably in arrears with his rent.

"Turn him out," said Richard laconically. "We don't want any of his sort on the place."

"But he, and his father, and his grandfather before him, have all been tenants, sir," returned Mr. Collins. "The man is as hard working as any we have to do with, and as his lordship used to say, 'The Knolle Farm is not as good as it might be.'"

"In that case reduce his rent a little, and if he cannot pay that regularly, give him notice to quit. From what I can learn, the place has been run too charitably for a great many years.

past. It's no wonder we cry out about the depression in agriculture."

"You will excuse my saying so," remarked Margetson, "but his late lordship, your uncle, never tried to make a profit out of the place. He was content to see his tenants happy and prosperous."

"That may be all very well," answered Richard, leaning back in his chair with the air of a man who has mastered all the mysteries of finance. "Unhappily, however, for that state of things, I have inherited a business instinct. If I have good tenants I am quite prepared to do my best by them, but they, in their turn, must do their best by me. You surely would not expect me to lose by the transaction? Why should I?"

Had you been one of Mr. Margetson's clerks you would doubtless have been able to tell by the curious way in which he shifted his neck in his collar that the old gentleman was upset. He ventured no answer, however, to Richard's last speech.

"And now with regard to the castle and the employees?" said Richard. "It seems to me that there are a great many people employed."

Mr. Collins thereupon furnished him with a list of the workmen on the estate, including the Home Farm.

"You see, sir," continued Collins, "his lordship has always done things liberally. I don't say that we have too many people on the place for the work, but we have quite sufficient. Several of them, however, are pensioners who do just what they can, and when they can."

"Turn them all off," replied Richard. "Allow ~~them~~ half-a-crown apiece a-week, and say that we do not stand in need of their services."

Mr. Collins made a note in his book without replying. Who could tell what thoughts were in his mind?

"Stay," said Richard, "I have no desire to be hard upon them. When you give them notice hand each one of them a guinea."

An entry of this was also made in the notebook. Meanwhile, Mr. Margetson held his peace. Perhaps, like the proverbial parrot, he was thinking the more.

Having catechized Collins sufficiently, Richard bade him good-afternoon. Had he heard the remarks that fell from that worthy's lips as he wended his way down the drive towards the old trap drawn by the old grey pony, he would have learnt something that he would scarcely have been edified at.

When Collins had withdrawn from the room, Richard seated himself more comfortably in his

chair, as if with the idea of talking the matter over with his legal adviser.

"I am sure you will agree with me, Mr. Margetson," he began, "that for many years past the place has been run on entirely wrong lines. I myself am a man who has had to make his own way in the world unbacked by any influential friends. For this reason I know the value of money. Now, willing as I am to help those who really stand in need of assistance, I cannot allow myself to be defrauded by those who have only their own folly to thank for their misfortunes. A list of deserving folk drawn up, shall we say, by the vicar of the parish, and perhaps endorsed by yourself, will always have my ready consideration. I do not, however, intend to allow myself to become a pigeon for every swindler who may think it worth his while to bleed me."

"I think I begin to understand," replied the lawyer dryly, and there was a look in his steely-grey eyes that Richard did not like. He had imagined that by insisting on economy he would have enlisted the other's sympathy. This, however, did not seem the case.

"When everything is settled I presume you will live here?" continued the lawyer.

"I am not at all sure of that," Richard replied. "It is a very big place to keep up.

However, we have plenty of time to think of that."

The lawyer drove home that evening with a sinking heart. He could plainly see that the glories of Weldersham were trembling in the balance.

"We might have foreseen this," he said to himself. "The man has meanness stamped upon every feature of his face. How he comes to be a Sandridge is more than I can tell. Oh, what a pity it is that he has come into the property."

Many other people were destined to reiterate this wish before the next few weeks were over.

Though the most diligent search was made along the French coast no tidings could be heard of Reggie. In consequence, Richard succeeded to his inheritance, for the handling of which his fingers had so long been itching. Mrs. Maddison and Dorothy still remained at the castle, though they had intimated to the new owner that they were ready to move out as soon as he wished them to do so.

Three days after his legal accession to the title, Richard made his way to Weldersham. He had telegraphed to warn them of his arrival, and a carriage met him at the railway-station. He was in by no means a good temper. He had come down with the express purpose of breaking some



intelligence to the inmates of the castle, and as he was aware, it was scarcely likely to make him popular. He took what he considered to be the best course, and made himself as disagreeable as possible. He earned the coachman's gratitude by finding fault with the horses, which he declared to be overfed and underworked. The front door was not opened to him with quite the quickness he imagined was due to his dignity. He accordingly pleasantly remarked that it was a warm day, and that the men had doubtless been enjoying a nap instead of attending to their duties. In this way the pleasure of his arrival travelled as far as the servants' hall and the housekeeper's room.

Mrs. Maddison received him with what was almost a frightened air, but Dorothy was coolness itself. She had not forgiven him, nor was she at all likely to do so. She knew him for exactly what he was, and he, poor wretch, was aware of the fact. He could fret and fume and bully as he liked, but he could not look into her honest eyes. As he soon discovered; this was a feat altogether beyond him.

"If you will allow me," he said, addressing Mrs. Maddison, "I should like to go round the house." •

"Shall I take you over it?" asked the old lady.

He declined the honour, however, by saying that he would not trouble her, but would ring for Mrs. Marlow, the housekeeper. When that worthy arrived they set off together.

"Mark my words, mamma, Richard is meditating some important step. What is more he is ashamed of it, and that's the truth of the matter."

"My dear, I am afraid you are very hard on your cousin," said her mother. "You have taken a dislike to him."

"I admit it," she replied. "I do not like Richard, and I never shall!"

"And yet I am sure he means to be kind."

"When it pays him to be, not unless," her daughter retorted. "He hurt poor old Some's feelings very much this morning by insinuating that he went to sleep instead of doing his work."

"Oh, it was only a pleasantry, I have no doubt," said her mother. "Some has grown old in our service, and perhaps he is a little touchy."

Meanwhile his lordship, accompanied by old Mrs. Marlow, was proceeding on his tour of inspection of the castle. He explored the family dining-room and the state banqueting-hall, the blue and white drawing-rooms, his cousin's boudoir, the domestic portion of the house, and

then proceeded up-stairs to the picture-gallery, and the endless succession of bedrooms. There are some people who can find fault where others would never discover it. Richard was singularly gifted in this way. In every corridor and in almost every room he had something to complain of, until poor panting Mrs. Marlow felt, as she expressed it later, as if she could drop through the floor for shame.

"How many housemaids have you?" Richard asked at last.

"Eight, sir—I mean my lord," the old woman replied.

Richard heaved a sigh which seemed to say, "eight housemaids, and the work not better done than this!"

Having dismissed the housekeeper, he called the butler, questioned him as to the contents of the wine-cellar, and then decided to inspect it himself. The old man's description of that interview aroused a storm of indignation later.

"We're a bit short in our every-day port," he said to Mrs. Marlow, "and during all the trouble of late I must have forgotten to put a bottle down in my book. He counted it over and found that we was one short. He didn't say in so many words that I had taken it, but he shook his head and said something about a wine-book being a check against dishonesty. Me dis-

'honest, who has had the key of that cellar for over forty years!"

"And he told me that my bedrooms was a disgrace to me," said Mrs. Marlow. "To think that I should live to hear that!"

The two old worthies shook their heads mournfully for the times that were, and as if in anticipation of the days to be.

"Ah, if it had only been Master Reggie," continued the old lady. "It would have been very different. He'd have gone up the grand staircase and tramped all over the carpets with his muddy boots, as he used to do as a boy, and the girls would have cleaned up after him with thankfulness in their hearts. But to be told that I don't look after the maids is too much!"

"It is my belief that there is worse to come," the old man asserted.

While this conversation was proceeding, Richard was overhauling the stables. Sykes, the head coachman, showed him round. The great flagged stone yard was as clean as a new pin; the stalls and boxes were miracles of neatness.

"How many horses have you?" asked his lordship.

"At present there's ten, my lord, including his lordship's two old hunters, that is pensioned off, as you might say."

"Eight carriage-horses to do the work of this

place?" cried Richard aghast. "I never heard of such waste. Four should be more than able to do it."

"Four *could* do it, of course, my lord, but his lordship never liked to see that row of boxes empty."

"What's that grey at the top?"

"That's the Grey Friar, my lord. Miss Dorothy's horse. His lordship bought him for her last year at Tattersals'."

Richard heaved another sigh, and then left the stables to proceed in the direction of the Home Farm. He had ordered Collins, the agent, to meet him there, and when he entered the large yard the gentleman in question came forward to receive him. The latter had prepared a report of the farm and produce.

"It seems to be a very fair example of up-to-date farming," said Richard, when he had made himself familiar with everything. "Experiments tried in every field, and the ground practically sown with sovereigns."

"It was never his lordship's desire to make money out of it," replied Mr. Collins. "The Home Farm was his favourite hobby."

"I am quite aware of what my uncle's hobbies were," Richard returned quickly, and then went on to inquire how many men were employed on the farm.

Collins informed him, and was told that there were too many by half.

"I must admit," said the agent, "that a good many of them are not much good. They are old men who have served his lordship all their lives, and for that reason he would not turn them off."

"They will not serve me," said Richard, "so I think we may very well dispense with them. Keep those who you can get any work out of, and discharge the rest."

"Very good, my lord," said the agent, but his heart was sorely troubled. Winter would soon be upon them, and if they could no longer find employment, there would be nothing left for the old folk but the poor-house.

Guessing what was passing in the agent's mind, Richard resolved to set himself right with him.

"It is of course very painful to have to act in this way, Mr. Collins," he began in his best manner. "But you are of course aware, being a man of the world, that when one takes a new estate or a new business of any description, there are lots of little things, committed by one's predecessor, that have necessarily to be amended. No one is more sorry than myself to have to discharge old people, but what would happen if I were to retain them? In course of time the

estate would be a home for the derelicts of the neighbourhood."

"Your lordship would not feel inclined to pension them off, I suppose?" said the other. "They are all honest men, and have borne the heat and burden of the day for your family."

"And have been excellently well paid for it, I'll be bound," replied Richard. "If they have not laid by something during the years they have worked for my uncle, then, I think you will agree with me, that it is scarcely fair I should be called upon to remedy that deficiency. At any rate I do not feel disposed to do so. An estate like this must be conducted on business principles or not at all."

The head gamekeeper was thereupon sent for, and questioned as to the number of men in his employ, and the prospects of the coming season. Richard was well aware that the estate had been excellently well preserved, for though the old Earl did not shoot himself, he always made his friends welcome. What was more, it was one of his idiosyncrasies never to sell a head of any sort of game. Needless to say that policy did not meet with Richard's approval. He looked upon it as little less than a sinful waste of money. His gorge rose within him when he reflected on the enormous sum of money that had been

filtered away year after year in the past. He determined that things should be very different now that he was in command. By the time he returned to the castle once more, he had got the capabilities of the place at his fingers' ends, and felt that he had done a good day's work. The case was somewhat different with his dependents. Mr. Collins rode home to his wife with uneasiness in his heart.

"Things are going to be very different on the estate now, my dear," he said. "Mark my words, the new owner is one of those men who would spoil a new knife to skin a flint. I am to discharge all the old men, and without a pension! Before we know where we are he will be discharging me too. It's my belief he hasn't a heart, only a money-bag where it ought to be!"

"Never mind," replied his wife. "You know that you have always done your duty. Thank goodness, if he does turn us adrift, we have saved enough to be independent of him."

"It isn't that," answered her husband. "It's the old folk I am thinking of. It will come cruel hard on them when the winter sets in."

"It is a strange thing that a man who has been raised to such a pitch of fortune should immediately begin to tyrannize over those who



are struggling to keep themselves alive. I can't understand it!"

"Ah! it's because you are good and simple," returned the other. "You think every one is like yourself. But you have only to look at the new lord to see what is in his heart. Money is his idol, and he thinks of nothing else."

By that evening's post a letter came for Richard. Whatever it might have been about it appeared to give him great satisfaction. He did not comment upon its contents to the ladies, but next morning he announced the fact that he had a friend coming down to spend the day with him. Dorothy knew that her cousin had not many friends, if he had any, and she accordingly looked anxiously at him.

"It will be nice for you to show your lovely house and property to your friend," said Mrs. Maddison sympathetically. "He will of course remain for the night? Shall I give orders for a room to be prepared?"

"On the contrary, he says he must get back to town by the afternoon train," Richard replied. "He is an Australian by the name of Banfield."

His guest was expected by the half-past eleven train, and half-an-hour before his arrival Richard rode in to meet him. He had spoken of him to his cousin as a friend, but had any one been

there to see, they would have noticed that when the train disgorged its human freight he did not recognize Mr. Banfield among the passengers. He accordingly made his way to the door of the carriage and waited. The station master must have supplied the colonial gentleman with the information he required, for a few seconds later a tall, freckled individual strode towards the carriage, raising his hat as he did so.

"The Earl of Weldersham, I believe?" he began, as he came up to where Richard was standing.

"And I presume that you are Mr. Banfield?" replied Richard, giving him his hand.

"That is my name," said the other. "I received your lordship's telegram last night, and have come down by the train you mentioned. The country about here is very charming!"

"Delightful!" answered Richard. "But you have not seen the prettiest side of it yet."

Then they entered the carriage and drove off along the high road through the village towards the castle.

Mr. Banfield had been three-months in England, and during that time he had been searching for a residence worthy of his vast wealth. As he informed Richard during the drive, he had travelled the length and breadth

of the country, had inspected dozens of tumble-down old barns, dignified in the catalogues by the name of castles, but so far had discovered nothing that would suit him.

"I must have something that would give me a standing in the County," he asserted, "and what is more, I do not mind paying handsomely for what I want."

This was a man after Richard's own heart. If he took Weldersham, he said to himself, he certainly should *pay* for it, and pretty stiffly too. At last they reached the lodge gates, which were thrown open by a neatly-dressed old lady, who seemed to harmonize exactly with the surrounding scenery. The Colonial's eyes brightened as he looked around him. He took in the long avenue of stately elms, the deer lying in the bracken, the grassy slopes leading up to the woodlands beyond, and then the stately castle from the bridge.

"This is by far the finest place I have seen yet," he cried enthusiastically. "You may well talk about your stately homes of England when you've places like this. Lor, what a pity it is I did not bring my good lady down with me. She would have been charmed with it!"

"We should have been delighted to have seen Mrs. Banfield," Richard hastened to reply.

"And they tell me that one of your ancestors

defended the castle against one of Cromwell's generals? Which side was that?"

For a moment the Earl of Weldersham was nonplussed. He had never bothered himself very much about the history of the old pile. He did not see, however, neglecting a point so obviously in his favour.

"It was on the opposite side of the building," he asserted, with all the gravity due to such a statement. "If you should care to see it I should be very glad to show it to you after lunch."

By this time they had drawn up at the front door, and Richard had invited his guest to alight. Mr. Banfield was delighted with all he had so far seen, and was prepared to be pleased with everything.

Mrs. Maddison and Dorothy received him with the courtesy they would have shown to any stranger—and to the friend of their relative—but it was easy to see that the latter was not cordial. Her suspicions were gradually becoming a certainty. She felt sure in her own mind that there was something more behind Mr. Banfield's visit than met the eye.

After luncheon the two gentlemen visited the stables, the Home Farm, and the various gardens. By the time they again reached the house Mr.

Banfield had seen all that there was to be seen, and was correspondingly delighted. He returned to town by the six o'clock train, and when Richard had seen him off he felt that the most difficult part of the work had been accomplished satisfactorily. Two days later a letter arrived for him by the early post. From the gratified smile that flitted across his face as he read it, it might be rightly judged that its contents were satisfactory.

After breakfast Richard ordered the carriage and rode into Weldersham to consult with Mr. Margetson. That gentleman rose to receive him, but did not show any great cordiality. He placed a chair for the young man, and then asked him to seat himself.

"What can I do for you this morning?" he asked, as he took his own place behind his writing-table.

"I have come to see you on a rather important matter," Richard began, with what it must be confessed was some trepidation, for he had his own reasons for supposing that the lawyer would not approve of the course of action he was about to pursue.

"If I can I shall be delighted to help you," said Mr. Margetson. "May I ask the nature of this particular business?"

Richard smoothed his gloves out upon his knee, and fidgeted about on his chair before he replied. Then he began—

“As you know, Mr. Margetson, I am a very plain man. Circumstances have compelled me to always live a very quiet life hitherto, and perhaps the habit has grown upon me until it has become second nature.”

The lawyer bowed gravely, but said nothing.

“You are of course aware,” the other continued, “that Weldersham Castle is a very large place, and very expensive to keep up. Too large, in fact, for a bachelor. I know none of the County people, and I have no desire to know them. What is more, I should never spend more than a fortnight in the year there!”

“You propose, therefore, closing the castle, I presume?” put in the lawyer, “and only using it on rare occasions?”

“I intend to do more than that,” Richard replied, somewhat encouraged by the other’s manner. “I intend to let it!”

“To let Weldersham Castle?” cried the lawyer in supreme astonishment, as though he could hardly believe his own ears. “Surely you must be jesting!”

“I was never more serious in my life,” Richard replied. “I have found an excellent tenant—a wealthy Australian. My business

with you this morning is to ask you to undertake the necessary legal arrangements.

Mr. Margetson was so much upset by the intelligence he had received that he was unable to do or say anything for a few moments. It was inconceivable to him that Richard, a man with an enormous income, should, for the first time in the history of the family, contemplate handing over the ancestral seat to a wealthy Colonial.

"But surely," the old lawyer remarked at last, when he had recovered himself a little, "you can afford to close the place—anything rather than let a stranger have it!"

"I fail to see the argument," Richard retorted. "He is willing to take it on lease at five thousand pounds a year, and I should consider myself mad if I allowed such an opportunity to escape me for the sake of a little sentiment. I have also placed the house in Town in the agent's hands, and if I succeed as well in letting that, I shall be satisfied."

Margetson saw that remonstrance would be useless, and that no amount of talking would shake Richard in his determination. He accordingly promised to attend to the necessary legal part of the business, and then escorted his client to the carriage. When he had seen him drive away he returned to his sanctum, and rang

the bell for his head clerk. To that worthy he related what had occurred.

"It's a bad business, Nailor," he said. "I should never have dreamt that a Weldersham could have been guilty of such a thing. It seems incredible!"

"It's a pity, sir, that he ever came into the title at all," the clerk returned.



## CHAPTER X

NEARLY two years had elapsed since the Earl of Weldersham's death, and more than eighteen months since that stormy interview which Richard had had with his Cousin Dorothy, during which she had spoken her mind to him so plainly. In that period the eighth earl had certainly worked wonders with his bank balance. His estates were now being worked on the most economical principles. Weldersham Castle was let to Mr. Banfield, the wealthy Australian, who, I regret to say, had not proved such a success in the County as he had hoped to be. The Town house was let to a South African millionaire, concerning whom popular report had the strangest stories to tell. Richard himself took a small house in a south-western suburb of London, and devoted himself to the congenial task of discovering how large a sum of money he could manage to accumulate in twelve months. He was as sparing in his amusements as he was in everything else. He belonged only to one club ;

he neither hunted, fished, nor shot. He did not patronize race-meetings, and he could not have taken up yachting, even had he been willing to do so, for the reason that nature had made him the poorest of poor sailors. Some folk wondered why he did not marry, but they were not the people who knew him best. As a matter of fact his sudden succession to his uncle's wealth had destroyed all that was good in him. He lived only for his money, and the chance of making it. His favourite literature was his bank-book and the *Financial Times*. The only recreation he permitted himself was a visit to his broker's office in the vicinity of the Stock Exchange. The latter gentleman on one occasion was heard to declare, when he had been nearly driven distracted by his client's meanness, "that his lordship had bowels of brass, a heart of stone, and no more compassion than a rat." He was certainly a hard man at a bargain was the eighth Earl of Weldersham.

It behoves me now, however, to return to Mrs. Maddison and her daughter Dorothy. When, after the letting of Weldersham Castle they found themselves deprived of a home, they decided to winter abroad before settling down again. In the spring they returned to England and domiciled themselves in a pretty little house in a fashionable part of South Kensington. So far

Richard, who still retained a vivid remembrance of the lashing he had received from the younger lady's tongue, had not called upon them.

"She had no right to speak to me in the way she did," he told himself in virtuous indignation whenever he thought of the matter. "One would suppose that a man has no right to do as he pleased with his own property. What would my life have been like living in that great barrack alone? It was well enough for my uncle, who was an old man, and it would be all right for me if I were married. But to have to keep it up as the County would expect me to, would only spell ruin. Under the circumstances, therefore, I do not see that I could have done better than to have let to Banfield, who is a careful tenant and a rich man."

One afternoon in May, Richard had occasion to visit the West End. His business took him from Piccadilly to Bond Street. Halfway along that fashionable thoroughfare his attention was attracted by a certain article in a shop window. He paused to look at it, and when he had satisfied his curiosity turned to move on again. To his surprise and annoyance, as he did so, he found himself confronted by no less a person than his 'cousin Dorothy. His face flushed crimson, and he would have passed her had she not detained him.

"Come, come, Richard," she said, "I am not going to let you pass me by like this. Won't you stop and say, 'How do you do'?"

Richard murmured the question, but with a very bad grace.

"I am very well, thank you," she answered with corresponding gravity. "You will be glad to hear that mamma is also very well. I hope you have not been ill, Richard?"

He knew that she was laughing at him, and he hated her for it.

"I am never ill," he returned abruptly. "I am very busy, however, and fear I must not detain you."

"In other words you want to get rid of me," she replied. "But I am not going to let you do so. I have not seen you for such a long time that I am going to punish you by making you take me somewhere to tea. Where shall we go?"

Richard would have given anything to have been able to think of a good excuse for escaping, but not being able to invent one on the spur of the moment, he merely replied that he should be delighted to do as she asked. He did not know, however, where to take her.

"I am afraid you are not much of a lady's man," she remarked. "You must let me show you a place. Come along."

They presently entered a pretty tea-shop, and

took their places at one of the tables in the room. When tea had been placed before them, and Dorothy had poured out a cup for Richard and one for herself, she regarded that young man gravely.

"How is it that you have not been to see us, Richard?" she inquired. "It is not kind to neglect your relatives."

"I have been very busy," Richard faltered. "Besides, I scarcely ever go into Society."

"Perhaps you do not know our address," his tormentor continued.

"Oh, yes, I know that," Richard admitted. "Margetson gave it to me."

"And I know where you live," she returned. "Though why you should be content to live in such an out-of-the-way place, and in such a small house, with your money, I cannot imagine."

"It suits me very well," he replied. "I lead a very quiet life, and I don't care for display."

"Well, after all, that is no excuse for not coming to see us," she asserted. "Now, understand me, Richard; mamma and I shall expect you next Sunday afternoon at four o'clock. If you do not put in an appearance I shall call upon you and bring half-a-dozen girls. You won't like that, you know. Is it agreed that you will come?"

Though Richard felt that he would rather do

anything than comply with her request, he could see that there was nothing for him but to promise to visit Dorothy and her mother.

"It will give me great pleasure to come," he remarked.

"That is not quite the truth," Dorothy replied, shaking her head at him and picking up her gloves, "but it is near enough for the present."

When Richard had paid the bill they left the restaurant together, and he walked with her as far as Piccadilly. After placing Dorothy in a 'bus he made his way homeward, reflecting that, after all, she was a very pretty girl, and also that she could be very charming when she pleased. It was a pity that she was not a little more respectful towards himself, however. Then he recalled the fact that she was the possessor of ten thousand pounds, which would be turned into twenty thousand at her mother's death.

Faithful to the promise he had given, the hour of four on the following Sunday afternoon found him standing at the door of the house in South Kensington, which had been taken by Mrs. Maddison and her daughter. He accompanied the trim maidservant up the stairs to the drawing-room. It had been his prayer that he might find the two ladies alone. To his dismay, however, there were two other ladies present whom he did not know, young Lord Dorset, whom he did,

and whom, he frankly admitted to himself, he detested more than any other human being in the world.

Mrs. Maddison received Richard most kindly, while Dorothy was affability itself. The name of Weldersham Castle was not even mentioned, and as for the Town house, it might never have been built for all that was said about it. Contrary to his expectations, Richard enjoyed the visit after his own fashion, and even went so far as to promise to drop in some other Sunday afternoon.

"It's evident they can't do enough for me now that I'm the Earl of Weldersham," said the genial gentleman to himself when he left the house. "If I were still plain Richard Sandridge they would take no more notice of me than they used to do."

Had he heard the conversation that followed his departure his theory would have been a little upset.

"I thought you were not very fond of your cousin," said Lord Dorset, when he was alone with Dorothy.

"I cannot say that I am passionately fond of him," she replied. "At the same time I pity him. He must have a wretched existence."

"If he is wretched it's his own fault," Lord Dorset replied. "With his wealth he ought to be

able to do anything. I've no patience with the fellow, living as he does."

"Poor Richard!"

Lord Dorset looked across the room at the piano, on the top of which stood a portrait of his old friend, Reggie. Dorothy's eyes followed his. Then he rose from the chair and crossed the room to look at the picture.

"There is the man who should have had the money," he said. "Poor old Reggie! You don't know how I miss him, even now."

Dorothy's mouth quivered. She in her turn rose and crossed to the piano.

"Lord Dorset, I wonder if you would think me silly if I were to say that, even after all this long time, I cannot believe that Reggie is really dead. I don't know why I should think so; I do not know why it is I feel so certain. But I cannot suppress the conviction that we shall see him again."

"I would give anything if that could come to pass," he answered. "I have no such hope, however. If he were alive he would certainly have communicated with us ere this. It would not be like Reggie to keep his friends in suspense concerning his fate."

"But there have been such strange cases of men who have been lost for years turning up again," Dorothy argued.



"Mrs. Dartrell must have perished at any rate," he replied. "Dressed as she was nothing could have saved her."

He was silent for a moment. Then he continued—

"Poor Stella, there are times when I am almost tempted to believe that it was as well for her. Reggie, I know, did not love her, and their marriage could never have been a happy one. I do not wish to speak ill of the dead, but I have a settled conviction that Reggie was well aware of the mistake he had made."

"You think, then, that he did not love her?"

"I am certain that he did not," Lord Dorset replied.

Dorothy felt as if her companion must surely hear the beating of her heart.

At last they left the piano and returned to the seat in the window. Lord Dorset had suddenly grown silent. His handsome, boyish face was graver than usual.

"Miss Maddison," he said, after about five minutes' silence, "how long have we known each other?"

Dorothy's woman's instinct must have warned her of what was coming, for she glanced hurriedly at him in a frightened manner, then suddenly pulling herself together, and trying to

appear unconcerned, she walked across the room and placed a cup on the tea-tray.

"Longer than I can remember," she answered, with her back towards him. "You spent the first holiday after you went to Eton at Weldersham. Do you remember our games of cricket in the field next the lawn, and the day that you hit the ball into the river, and Reggie fell in while endeavouring to get it out? What a long time ago it seems."

She spoke hurriedly, as if she were anxious not to give him a chance of answering.

Leaving the window, Lord Dorset crossed the room to the fire-place, beside which she was standing.

"That must be nearly seventeen years ago," he said. "I wonder if it would surprise you, Miss Dorothy, to hear that for all this time I have been in love with you."

"Oh, Lord Dorset, you must not say that," she protested. "I cannot listen to you if you do."

"But you must hear me," he continued, drawing a little closer to her. "I cannot let you off. As I say, it is seventeen years since I began to love you, and every year has added to that love. I am not much of a fellow, I know, but I think I could make you happy! I would spend my whole life trying. Will you be my wife?"

Dorothy was taken completely aback by the suddenness of this proposal. She had always liked Lord Dorset, but she had never dreamt that he entertained such a warm affection for herself.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she cried, with real grief, "so very sorry!"

"Am I to understand that what I ask is impossible?"

"Quite impossible," she answered. "I shall always like you and value your friendship, but, believe me, there can be never anything more between us!"

"Will you forgive me if I ask one more question? It shall be the last."

"What is it? It would be hard if I could not answer you."

"May I ask if there is any one else whom you prefer?"

"There is no one," she replied. "I can say that most truthfully."

"Thank God! For if you do not love any one else there is still some chance of my winning you."

"Oh, don't say that," she returned. "You must not think of such a thing. I have made up my mind long since that I shall never marry!"

As she said this she glanced almost un-

consciously at the portrait on the piano, and Lord Dorset noticed the action.

"I think I can guess," he said. "Forgive me, if I hurt you. You loved poor old Reggie?"

There was a short pause before she replied.

"I always loved him," she said. "There can be no harm in my saying so now."

"He was the only person to whom I could willingly have surrendered you," Lord Dorset answered. "I am not going to despair, however. You have admitted that you like me. Now I must endeavour to turn that friendship to some account."

"Your labour will be in vain," she replied. "But do not let us talk any more upon this subject. You do not know how painful it is to me. You are my friend, and if you attempt to be anything more it will mean that our friendship cannot continue. I would not have that happen for worlds."

"Nor I," he answered. "Try to forget that I ever said anything to you upon this subject. And now I must be going. Good-bye."

On leaving the house Lord Dorset, with a heavy heart, made his way home, to tell the mother, to whom he had confided all his secrets since childhood, of his blighted hopes.

"Good heavens!" he muttered to himself, "what a contrary world it is to be sure. Dorothy

loved Reggie, but yet he was going to marry a woman who was not worthy even to button her boots. I love her beyond all living women, and she will not think of me because her heart is with the dead."

During the few days that followed his visit to South Kensington Richard thought much of the cordial reception he had received at his cousin's hands. For the first time in his life he began to think seriously of his loneliness in life. Would he be acting wisely in taking to himself a wife? he asked himself. He suffered acutely when he reflected that, in the event of his having no heir, the wealth which he was striving so hard to accumulate, to say nothing of the title and estates, would pass to the representative of another branch of the family, whom he detested as cordially as he did Lord Dorset.

"Rather than that I'd marry anybody," was his not too complimentary remark, when he had given the matter more than usual consideration.

On the following Sunday he once more made a pilgrimage to South Kensington, was as kindly received as before, and left the house more impressed than ever with the notion of securing Dorothy, and the idea of adding her prospective twenty thousand pounds to his already overflowing banking account. There was only one fear in his breast, and that was that she might

chance to succumb to the attractions of the Earl of Dorset. That that nobleman was in love with her he had convinced himself on the first occasion that he had seen them together. The thought irritated him beyond all measure, but it also had the effect of making him think more seriously than ever of his scheme. By the time he had paid one or two more visits to South Kensington his fears had subsided. He was convinced that Dorothy and his supposed rival were good friends and nothing more, and from that moment he looked upon Dorothy and her fortune as his property beyond all shadow of doubt. The only question was, when should he put the question to her?

"I suppose if I do marry her," he said to himself, "even old Margetson and the tenants at Weldersham will come round. They hate me like poison as it is."

He also reflected that, before giving her consent, Dorothy might stipulate that he was to turn Mr. Banfield out and to take up his residence at the castle.

"I could not do that," he said, with the excellent rental he was receiving for Weldersham in his mind. "She might want the Town house too, and in that case I should have to live up to quite twenty thousand a year. No, if I marry her she will have to be content with a little

place in the country, and an occasional run up to London. I wouldn't mind going as far as that. One thing is quite certain, she's forgotten all about Reggie, whatever she may have thought of him once."

On the Thursday following the soliloquy I have just set down, Richard hit upon a brilliant idea. He remembered that on the previous Sunday afternoon he had heard Dorothy regret that she had not seen a certain comedy, then being performed with great success at a West End theatre. Here was his opportunity. He would prove to them that he was not so mean as they thought him to be. He would take a box and invite Dorothy and her mother to share it with him. In accordance with this plan he made his way to a booking-office with the intention of securing the seats in question. Prudence, however, prevailed before he got there, and he determined first to visit South Kensington, and make sure of his cousins, before proceeding further in the matter.

"I am sure Dorothy will be delighted," said Mrs. Maddison, when she had heard his proposal. "It is very kind of you, Richard, to give us the pleasure. Won't you wait, however, and ask Dorothy yourself? I am expecting her back every minute."

Richard consented to wait, and during the

interval did his best to ingratiate himself with Mrs. Maddison. Her description of their *tête-à-tête* is worth recording.

"Poor Richard may really be very worthy," she said. "At the same time he is exceedingly difficult to entertain. He has no conversation, and what he does talk about is mostly concerning his investments. He gave me the particulars of a new railway line in the Midlands, of a Foreign Loan, and bewailed the fate of a Sea Bath Company, I think it was, which had only paid five per cent. last year instead of eight, as he expected it would do. By the time Dorothy came in I felt as if my brains were turned to cotton-wool."

When that event happened the young lady was made aware of the reason of Richard's visit. It thereupon appeared that Mrs. Maddison had been a little forgetful.

"Why, mamma," said Dorothy, "surely you must remember that Lord Dorset has taken seats for us for to-morrow night. Still, I'm sure we're very much obliged to Richard for his kindness."

That gentleman's first feeling was one of thankfulness that he had the foresight not to engage the box, his second of rage that the hated Lord Dorset should have forestalled him. He expressed his great regret that they could not accept his invitation.



A few minutes later Mrs. Maddison left the room, and Richard felt that the moment, so long waited for, had arrived. To say that he felt uneasy would be to put his feelings before you in an entirely wrong light. Even the thought of his wealth, and of his great position, was not sufficient to sustain him. When they had been alone for some minutes Dorothy began to wonder what his curious disjointed answers to her questions betokened. She could not remember ever having seen Richard like this before. She wished he would go, or that her mother would return to help entertain him. As for the wretched man himself, he was fighting desperately to collect his thoughts and to enter upon the matter before him.

"I wonder, Dorothy," he said at last, as though speaking on a sudden inspiration, "if you have ever considered what would happen if I were to die?"

"Good gracious, Richard," she cried in amazement, "what on earth makes you ask such a question?"

"One must think of these things sometimes," he said apologetically. Then feeling that he must say something more, he added: "You can't deny that we all have to die!"

By this time Dorothy was beginning to entertain serious thoughts regarding her cousin's sanity.

"Why doesn't mamma come?" she said to herself. "I'm sure there's something the matter with him."

Richard had now had time to look ahead and to realize that he was on the wrong tack. The mere thought of what he had been going to say was sufficient to bring a cold perspiration out upon his forehead. He looked more miserable than ever, and Dorothy watched him with anxious eyes.

"He cannot be tipsy," she said to herself, "for I know that he never touches anything. What can be the matter with him. Perhaps he's going to have a fit."

In her wildest dreams she had never imagined that Richard would think of proposing to herself.

"The fact is," Richard went on, "I have come here this afternoon to acquaint you with the fact that I think of getting married."

Ah! The cat was out of the bag at last. Dorothy gave a great sigh of relief. If Richard was in love it was no wonder that he behaved so strangely. She could understand everything now.

"I am very glad to hear it," she remarked. "You should have done so long since."

Richard took heart at this.

"Well, you see," he continued, "I have the

title and the money to think of. A man ought not to be selfish in these matters."

"Of course he should not," Dorothy answered. "I cannot tell you how glad I am to hear you talk like this, Richard."

"I must confess I was rather doubtful at first," he continued, warming to the subject as he proceeded. "There are so many things to be considered. Besides, I didn't know whether you would think about it in the same light as I do."

"I am very pleased," Dorothy replied, still quite in the dark, "and I am sure mamma will be. She said only the other day that she thought you ought to marry. I, for my part, didn't think you ever would."

"I didn't think so myself, until a week or two ago," Richard answered. "What I said to myself was, I must have a girl who has plenty of good common-sense—who'll look at matters in a proper light, and not expect too much!"

"Too much? What does that mean?"

"Well, you see, some girls would think because I have the title, that I should keep up both the houses, go to Court, and all that sort of thing. As you know, that isn't in my line. It isn't in yours either, is it?"

"I am afraid not," said Dorothy, who even now had not grasped the drift of affairs. "We've only this house, and I've not been presented."

"Still we could have a nice little house in the country, with a conservatory, and about half-a-dozen acres of land, and my wife could keep her carriage. I shouldn't grumble at that. I might even run to a hack."

"I am sure your wife would think you very generous," said Dorothy, with a touch of satire.

"And you think I might tell your mother?" said Richard, after consideration.

"Of course! Why not? She will be here in a few moments, and I am sure she will give you her congratulations."

At that moment the door opened and Mrs. Maddison entered the room. She had been having an interview with a new servant, and that individual had proved far from satisfactory. In consequence the good lady was a little short in her temper.

Richard was standing before the fire-place when Mrs. Maddison came in.

"Cousin Emily," he said, when Mrs. Maddison had taken a seat, "I have some news for you, and I hope it will please you."

"I am sure it will, mamma," said Dorothy.

"It will be pleasant to have something to please me," Mrs. Maddison returned, with some asperity, for really her temper had been sorely tried. "What is your news, Richard?"

Richard stared at the ceiling for a moment,

and afterwards at the floor. The matter appeared to be more difficult to explain than he had imagined.

"The fact of the matter is," he said, "I have asked Dorothy to be my wife, and she has consented."

"What?" screamed both Mrs. Maddison and Dorothy at the same moment.

"I have asked Dorothy to be my wife, and she has consented," Richard repeated, wondering at his younger cousin's strange behaviour.

The ladies stared at each other aghast.

"Good gracious! what do you mean?" Dorothy gasped.

"Surely you must be joking, Richard," said Mrs. Maddison.

"I never joke," Richard replied haughtily. "I mean what I say. Only a moment ago Dorothy confessed that she had no objection to my speaking to you concerning my proposal to her!"

By this time the humour of the situation had dawned upon Dorothy. She felt that she would have given anything to be able to throw herself down upon the sofa and laugh until the tears ran. Could it be possible, she asked herself, that the solemn Richard, whom she had congratulated so heartily, had all the time been proposing to her?

"I am afraid we have been playing at cross purposes, Richard," she said. "You certainly did not propose to me, nor did I accept you. You merely told me that you thought of getting married, but you did not state that I was the lady you intended marrying."

"Then you will not marry me?" he cried, turning fiercely upon her. "You've led me on; you've cheated and fooled me all these weeks, made me think that you cared for me, only at the last moment to throw me over."

"Richard, I am afraid you forget yourself," Mrs. Maddison protested, rising from her chair. "Dorothy, I am quite sure, has not done either of the things you suggest, and I cannot permit you to say so."

"Have it your own way then," retorted Richard, who by this time was fairly beside himself with rage. "Have it your own way. I was willing to marry your daughter, but now I wouldn't have anything to do with her, not if she were the last woman on earth. She's a——"

Before he could finish the sentence the door was thrown open, and the servant announced Lord Dorset. The latter saw that he had arrived at an inopportune moment, and he stood on the threshold scarcely knowing whether to advance or to retire.

"Come in, Lord Dorset," said Mrs. Maddison. "Good-afternoon, Richard!"

Richard did not reply, but strode from the room with all the dignity he could muster up at so short a notice. He had made his bid for matrimonial happiness and he was resolved never to repeat the experiment.

"I hope I am not intruding," said Lord Dorset, when the door had closed upon the other.

"I am very glad you came in," said Mrs. Maddison. "We have just had a very unfortunate scene with poor Richard. He wanted to——"

"Oh, please, mamma, don't say anything about it," Dorothy put in hastily. "Let us try to forget that it occurred. It is too foolish!"

"I think I can guess," said Lord Dorset. "And now may I tell you the reason of my visit? I have received some extraordinary news. What its value is I am at present unable to say. I thought, however, that you ought to know it at once."

"What is it?" Mrs. Maddison inquired.

"Early this morning I received a letter from Margetson, your family solicitor," Lord Dorset began. "He asked me to telegraph to him if he could see me, were he to come to London to-day. I replied to the effect that I should

be very glad to do so, though I had no idea of his errand. He came up, and we lunched together."

"And what *was* his errand?" Dorothy asked. Her face had suddenly grown very pale.

"Well, it's more than extraordinary, whichever way you look at," the young man replied. "Before I narrate what happened, however, I must impress upon you both the necessity of not attaching too much credence to it. From what I gathered from Margetson he was seated in his office on Tuesday last, when a man named Wilkins was ushered in. He declared himself to be a sailor, and though he did not give any definite information, he threw out hints to the effect that, if he were well paid, it would probably be in his power to give some information of supreme importance to the Weldersham estate. Before he would consent to open his lips, however, he demanded the payment of ten thousand pounds, five thousand to be given before he gave the information, and the balance upon that information proving to be correct. It appears that he had but lately arrived in England. Unfortunately, however, Margetson made the mistake of disbelieving him at the outset. He refused to pay anything at all until he had had the information and could judge of its worth. The man thereupon departed, declaring that he would take his



story to a quarter where he knew he would get well paid for it."

"But what can he know?" Mrs. Maddison asked. "Can he have discovered another heir to the title?"

Lord Dorset looked at Dorothy. He saw that she was trembling violently.

"Courage, courage," he said. "Remember there may be nothing in the man's tale after all."

"Ah, I understand," said Mrs. Maddison. "You think his story has something to do with poor Reggie?"

"I am certain it has," he answered.

"Haven't I told you that I was sure he was not drowned," cried Dorothy. "You will see that I am right. Oh, please God it may be true."

"I echo that with all my heart," said Lord Dorset.

And a more unselfish wish was never uttered.

## CHAPTER XI

IT was a cold wet evening, and Richard sat in his study after dinner, toasting his toes and examining the prospectus of a new railway company in which he was considerably interested. Occasionally he made a few notes on the margin, and when he had finished lay back in his chair and reflected that after all, despite the income-tax and the begging-letter writers, life was worth the living. He had not thought so in the old days when he had been a struggling barrister, who would willingly have sold himself to the Master of All Deceit, could he have got five hundred pounds by so doing. Now he was Baron Weldersham, of Weldersham, a man who, if things progressed as they were doing, would die worth upwards of a million pounds sterling. It was indeed a laudable ambition, and he resolved that on no account should any outside influence be allowed to interfere with it. He was still indulging in this pleasant reverie when there was the sound of a step on the sodden path outside.

This was followed by a sharp ring at the front door bell.

"Who can it be at this time of night?" asked his lordship of himself. "The post came in half-an-hour ago."

It was significant of the man and his life that he had no friends who would be likely to drop in. As a matter of fact he made no friends, and had no wish to make any. Friends would drink his whisky and smoke his cigars, to say nothing of disturbing him in his contemplation of the means whereby he might increase his wealth. Once more he wondered who the intruder could be.

"A person of the name of Wilkins to see your lordship," said his servant a minute or so later.

"Wilkins, Wilkins," said the peer, casting his mind over the circle of his acquaintance. "I don't remember any one of that name. What does he want?"

"He won't say, sir; but he said that he would like to speak to you on important business."

"Very well, show him in."

Then he added to himself, "Whoever he is, if he thinks he is going to get any money out of me he's much mistaken."

A moment later a tall, rough-looking man,

dressed in a suit of pilot-cloth, and carrying his hat in his hand, stood before Richard. His appearance was not one that would be likely to impress a stranger in his favour. He seemed to be aware of this fact, for his manner was obsequiousness itself.

"Well, what do you want with me?" asked Richard, when the servant had left the room. "You say that your name is Wilkins?"

He spoke as if he felt that whatever the other might have to say to the contrary, he should still have his doubts about it. The stranger touched his forelock and murmured something to the effect that his name really was what it was stated to be.

"Then what do you want with me?"

"I wanted to have a few minutes' chat with your lordship," the man replied. "I've got some information that I thought would be worth your lordship's knowing."

"What sort of information?" asked his lordship suspiciously.

"Well, to tell the plain truth, it's about your lordship's title and property," Wilkins replied.

Nothing could possibly have a better claim on Richard's attention.

"I suppose you've been down to the country and have heard some silly stories from a pack of

idiots, who think that because they happen to have served my uncle without having been found out, they have a claim upon my generosity. If you imagine that you are going to trade upon my feelings you are very much mistaken. I'm not that sort of man."

"No, your lordship, it's nothing to do with the country," the man replied civilly enough. "It's to do with your lordship's own self. You're Lord Weldersham, ain't you?"

"The mere fact that you are standing before me now shows that you know that," his lordship replied angrily. "If you cannot let me know your business quickly you had better leave me. My time is valuable."

There was something about the man's manner that his lordship did not like. And yet he was not conscious of possessing any secrets which the other would be likely to trade upon. He determined to get rid of his visitor with as little delay as possible. He accordingly said angrily—

"Now then, let me hear what you have to say, for I want to get you out of my sight."

"I am only a poor seafaring man," the other replied; adding with a whine, "I have gone down to the sea in ships and had my dealings in great waters, and them dealings hasn't paid me."

"You drank the profits, I suppose?" said Richard with a sneer.

"Very likely," answered Wilkins. "But that don't influence what I've come to say to your lordship. Your lordship seems very comfortable here, and I hear that there's a house in Belgrave Square, another in the country, and that the matter of the income is somewhere about thirty thousand pound a year."

"Nothing of the kind, nothing of the kind," returned his lordship quickly. "Besides, what have my affairs to do with you? What right have you to interfere with my private business?"

"Because I reckon it's going to be my business too," answered the man, rubbing his great hands together as if in apprehension of a stupendous joke. "I'm not going to pretend I'm a square-toes, never was, but what I do know is that when I get hold of a good bit of reliable business I'm the man to work it. You and me, m' lord, 'll be quite sociable before we've got through, for all you were so 'aughty when I fust come in. Perhaps there don't happen to be a drain of whisky that you could offer me? It would look more sociable like between folks as is going to be pardners."

There was something so truculent about the rascal's manner now, that Richard began to feel his heart sink within him. With what was

almost a groan he crossed to the sideboard, unlocked the tantalus, and took out the whisky decanter. When a glass and some water had been obtained, he bade the stranger help himself.

"You won't drink with me?" said the latter. "Well now, that's not what I call sociable; but never mind, I can do well enough by myself."

So saying, he poured himself out half a tumblerful of spirit, added a little water, and tossed the whole off with an air of the greatest enjoyment. Then he mixed another potation, drank it somewhat more slowly, and after that announced himself as ready for business.

"Might I ask," he inquired, "just by way of curiosity, how long ago it was that your cousin, the Honourable Reginald, took it into his head to throw himself overboard in the Channel?"

The man he addressed looked up at him with a startled face.

"Two years ago in June," he replied. "What has that got to do with your presence here?"

"It's just the key to the situation," responded Mr. Wilkins, upon whom the liquor he had imbibed was beginning to produce effect. "If he hadn't gone overboard, you and me, my lord, wouldn't be having this little confabulation now!"

He drank another tumblerful of whisky slowly



“Supposing your honourable cousin wasn't dead after all?”





and thoughtfully, and, having done so, hummed a few bars of a nautical ditty mainly concerned with the merits of the Black Ball line. Then, having regarded his companion out of the corner of his eye with considerable slyness, he returned to business.

"Now, what would your lordship 'ave to say supposing your honourable cousin wasn't dead after all?" he asked, and paused to watch the effect upon the other.

His lordship's face turned deadly pale and his jaw dropped. This dreadful possibility had never occurred to him. He had always looked upon the matter as one settled beyond all likelihood of doubt. A moment later, however, he had pulled himself together and was laughing scornfully.

"You're a fool to come and tell me such a tale," he cried. "It was proved conclusively that my cousin perished at sea."

"A werry, werry nice story," said Mr. Wilkins, nodding his head approvingly. "I should say the same myself if I was in your lordship's position. Now, as the beak says, 'let's review the evidence.' Here's a young swell as is over head and ears in debt, an' goin' to be married to a lady what—well, there ain't no call to talk of that now. Being tired of living, so to speak, he does not try to save himself or the lady. 'Let

me lie in the soft sea foam,' says he, being by nature of a nice way of talkin'. Then off he goes for to lie there. But providence, what sits up aloft and looks after the life of poor Jack, says 'no, you don't, my lad,' and in consequence he gets picked up by a French pilot cutter, and is carried into Cherbourg."

Richard sprang to his feet. Who can say what agony he suffered in that first moment. He felt as if all his wealth were being taken from him, coin by coin, and to him his wealth meant life.

"You are lying!" he cried. "I know that you are lying!"

Being by this time considerably advanced in liquor, Wilkins did not treat this accusation as seriously as he might have done at any other time. He merely remarked that the evidence he brought was true, and, what was more, he was in a position to prove that the young man in question was, at that moment, residing on a certain island in the Pacific, where he could be found as soon as was convenient.

"Now, my lord, or not my lord, as the case may be," said Mr. Wilkins, "the young fellow don't know that his uncle is dead, and he dursen't come back to England because he has nothing to live on if he comes. Now I'm the only one as is familiar with his whereabouts, and

what I want to know is who I am to play for? Mark this, whichever side I throws in my lot with wins! Don't forget that!"

"But how am I to know that this preposterous story is true?" asked Lord Weldersham in a choking voice. "I've a very good mind to defy you. You can't prove your case."

"Can't I? Werry well then, just cast your eye over that."

So saying he fumbled in the pocket of his coat and presently produced some papers, from among which he abstracted an envelope containing something stiff and hard. This proved to be a *carte-de-visite* photograph, which he passed across the table.

"I was with that young man the day he had that picture took in Honolulu. Of course, you can see the likeness, my noble lord!"

If the truth must be told, the unfortunate Richard was by no means a pretty sight at that moment. He sat staring at the photograph as if he were unable to withdraw his eyes from it. If the man depicted in the photograph was not Reggie, then the likeness was so remarkable as to be almost beyond belief. In his own mind he had unhappily no doubt. He felt almost faint with anxiety. Rising from his chair, he procured a tumbler and in his turn mixed himself a stiff glass of whisky and water.

"Come now," said Mr. Wilkins approvingly. "That's something like. I thought you'd be a bit more sociable after you had heard my news. When you come to think of it, what's a cousin more or less? I had a cousin once down Ratcliffe Highway what got both his legs smashed through putting 'em between two barges. The doctors they took and cut 'em off, and now you'd see him going about on two crutches as cheery as ever. We had a drink together to-day, as sociable as you and me are now."

What this anecdote had to do with the matter in hand, Richard did not endeavour to find out. He had too much to think of just then.

"Does any one else know of this beside yourself?" he asked anxiously.

"Not a living soul," Mr. Wilkins replied emphatically, bringing his fist down upon the table with a crash that caused the glasses to rattle.

"You are sure of that?"

"I'd take my Bible oath on it," said the man. "Belay there though, I'm forgetting—I've been down to Weldersham Castle."

"What?" shouted Richard, almost beside himself with terror. "Do you mean to say that you have been to Weldersham?"

It was plain to him that, if the fellow had

been telling his story there, everything was lost.

"I went down to the castle," continued Mr. Wilkins, "havin' made inquiries in London as to where your lordship's country house was, and thinkin' as how you'd be living there. But they told me you, being a miser, was saving money on the job, so to speak, and was hidin' away in London. They said if I had got any business with you, I had better go to the old lawyer in the town who did your business. Now, as a rule, I don't cotton to them gentlemen myself, but I went to see him."

"You went to Mr. Margetson? And what did you tell him?"

Mr. Wilkins was getting drowsy, and it became necessary to shake him into attention.

"He was a crusty old joker, was that lawyer," he remarked when he was roused to an understanding of the situation. "Never offered me a drop to wet my whistle."

"Go on, go on; tell me what you said to him," cried the agonized earl. "I shall know no peace until I have heard that."

"Now don't you hurry a man," replied Mr. Wilkins emphatically. "It never does no good, and—let me see, what was I a-saying of?"

"You were telling me of your visit to Mr. Margetson," said Richard, almost humbly.

"And so I was!" Wilkins replied. "A starchy old buck, he was, with grey whiskers and a bald head. 'Well, my man,' says he, 'and what is it you want with me?' I told him that I was a poor seafarer who had been down to the sea in ships and had his dealings in great waters."

"You said the same to me," said Richard. "Why can't you get on with your story?"

"Fair and softly, your noble lordship," remonstrated the other. "There ain't nothing to be got, don't yer know, by being nasty. Let dogs delight to bark and bite, for 'tis their nature to, but between you and me, if it come to rowing, you will find that Bill Wilkins can take his part as well as any other, lord or no lord."

His attitude became so aggressive that Richard fell back a step or two, fearing that he was about to be assaulted.

"This is a dreadful interview," said the hapless peer, as he saw the already intoxicated mariner mix himself another mate's nip. "If only he would get on with his story."

But to obtain any coherent information from that gentleman in the condition he was then in seemed impossible. He sang songs of the foc's'le in a voice that made the windows rattle, and which also made Richard tremble for his reputation in the neighbourhood.

"I shall never be able to hold my head up again," said that luckless gentleman to himself. "What on earth can I do to quiet him?"

From the musical Mr. Wilkins proceeded to the romantic. He shed tears over the remembrance of a certain Polly Harvey, whom he cursed most fluently, for a faithless hussy, a few minutes later. The aggressive, the musical and the romantic having been exhausted, he slipped from his chair, muttered something which Richard did not catch, and then composed himself for sleep upon the floor. Observing this his host went in search of his servant. Years seemed to have elapsed since his visitor had entered the room. To his servant he explained that Mr. Wilkins was the bearer of some important business information, threw out some vague hints concerning South Sea Concessions, and wound up by saying that under no conditions must the stranger be allowed to leave the house until he had been pumped dry of his information. Together they returned to the library, where they found Wilkins lying just as Richard had left him.

"We must put him to bed somewhere," said that gentleman, surveying the prostrate mariner with profound disgust as he spoke. "In the morning I will interview him and send him about his business."



Between them they got the other on to his feet, and then, each taking an arm, dragged and pushed him to an empty room, where they placed him in the bed, loosed his collar about his neck, removed his boots, and left him for the night.

"In case he should take it into his head to wander about the house, I think I will take the liberty of locking him in," said the prudent Richard, and his servant concurred with him.

How Richard slept that night I cannot say, but I must confess to having my doubts as to whether he was altogether happy. The uncertainty as to what Wilkins would do, what he had said to Margetson, and what sum he would require as hush-money, were ever-present terrors, while the question as to the terms on which he would be able to treat with the man for the great secret itself, were so uncertain as to be beyond the bounds of calculation. If Reggie were to return to England, he told himself, he would be compelled to surrender everything, and, what was worse, he would have to retire into the obscurity whence he sprang and the income upon which he had previously existed. The mere thought of such a thing took his breath away. Rather than do that he felt he would fight to the last gasp—he would even—— but he scarcely dared think what he would do.

As soon as it was light next morning he

repaired to the room in which he had deposited his guest. Mr. Wilkins was still sleeping heavily, and no amount of shaking was sufficient to rouse him. Richard groaned and returned to his own room, only to repeat the experiment, and with the same result, an hour later. When he eventually succeeded in rousing the sailor, which was not until considerably after nine o'clock, the latter was in by no means a good temper. Despite Richard's blandishments, he positively refused to answer questions.

"Clear out and fetch me something to drink," he demanded, and when his host brought him a cup of coffee, refused it with the remark that he "didn't want no slops." Having swallowed a stiff glass of brandy and soda, he declared himself to be better and quite equal to managing "a snack of breakfast." Once more Richard endeavoured to extract information from him, but was peremptorily ordered to "hold his jaw"; the other also informed him that if he kept quiet he'd hear everything in good time. What was more, he, Mr. Wilkins, hoped he'd like the information when he got it. Breakfast having been disposed of, they adjourned to the library.

"It's time we came to business," said Richard, with a show of authority which he was far from feeling.

"I'm agreeable," answered Mr. Wilkins, biting

off a chew of tobacco and expectorating with freedom into the grate. "There ain't nothing like business for money makin', as the Jew boy said when he bolted with two pound ten out of the till."

"In the first place," said Richard, "I want to know what you said to my solicitor, Mr. Margetson, at Weldersham?"

"I didn't do no business with him," the other replied. "The old boy wouldn't come to terms. I told him that I had a family secret for him, and if he'd pay me five thousand pounds down, and another five thousand when it was proved to be correct, I'd do a trade. He wouldn't hear of it, so I up and told him I'd take the information where I could get properly paid for it, meaning of course your worship's most noble lordship."

"Do you think that Mr. Margetson's suspicions were in any way aroused?" Richard inquired.

"I don't know nothing about his bloomin' suspicions," Mr. Wilkins replied. "I only know that he wouldn't fork out no money. That was enough for me. There's not a shadow of a doubt, as the books say, that that young fellow on the island I told you about is your cousin, Mr. Reginald Sandridge, the real Earl of Weldersham. While he's alive you ain't got no more right to the title or to the money than I have,

and what's more,"—here his voice dropped almost to a whisper,—“if I bring him to light again, you'll be jolly well sure to lose everything. And I don't mind telling you straight out, that that's what I am going to do if you don't make it well worth my while.”

Richard could see that the man meant what he said. All things considered it was a sad position for a man who loved money with such a passion as did Richard.

“I can't see that there is anything to be gained by such threats as you are making use of now,” said Richard timidly. “If your information is as valuable as you say, I have no doubt I shall be able to make terms with you. But not if you insult me!”

“You had better do it one way or t'other,” said the other, with a scowl. “I'm not a chap you can play with.”

His indulgence on the previous evening had certainly made him irritable.

“Just one moment, my man,” replied Richard. “Let us put the matter on a proper basis before we proceed any further. You are adopting a manner I do not at all like. How much better off would you be if I were to write to Mr. Margetson, my solicitor, upon whom you called, and tell him of your visit here? It would redound to my credit

if I were to surrender my right to the estate in favour of my long-lost cousin. What is more, in that case you would get nothing!"

This aspect of the affair had not struck the wily Wilkins. He regarded the man before him, not only with surprise, but also with anger. Then he swore vigorously and effectively. In that department at least his education had not been neglected. Richard allowed him to finish. Then he mustered his courage and spoke his mind.

"If you behave like this in my presence again," he said, "I shall have you turned out of the house. Remember that!"

Once more Wilkins swore, but this time it was in a subdued manner. It was apparent to his audience that he was not quite so sure of his ground as he had been.

When, an hour later, he left the house, he carried with him the Earl of Weldersham's cheque for one thousand pounds, and a written promise that he should receive another five thousand if the information he brought should prove to be correct.

Some three hours later a tall, muscular man ascended the steps of Dorset House and rang the bell. Upon inquiry he was informed that his lordship was at home, and that he had given

orders that he would see Mr. Stephen Marks, should he call. Mr. Marks followed the butler to his master's study.

"Well, Marks," said that young nobleman, when the door had closed upon the new arrival, "what have you to report?"

"I watched the house, my lord, as you ordered," the man replied, "and this morning a rough-looking customer, answering the description you gave me, came out about a quarter-past ten. He took a 'bus to the City and I followed him. He got down at the corner of Lombard Street and walked along until he came to the Anglo-Patagonian Bank, where he went in. When he came out again I followed him as far as a small public-house in the neighbourhood of Smithfield Market. I had to wait a long time for him there, and when he came out he had not much idea of what he was doing. I have found out where he is lodging, and here is his address, my lord."

He placed a small slip of paper before his employer.

"That's right," said Lord Dorset. "But how are we to find out his secret?"

This was the most difficult part of the whole business. They could shadow Mr. Wilkins as much as they pleased, but they could not compel him to talk. For the sake of his own interests

he would not be likely to give himself away—and if he did not—how were they to know what it was he was trading upon with Richard? Next day it was reported that he had visited the latter again, and that the remainder of his leisure was spent in pot-houses in a state of maudlin drunkenness.

“Seeing that in the condition he was then in he would not be likely to suspect me, I fell into conversation with him, my lord,” said the private detective to Lord Dorset when he reported progress. “But though I lured him on to talk about all sorts of foreign parts, he was too cunning to commit himself to anything definite. He’s been everywhere and seen most everything—but he ain’t the sort to give himself away.”

Lord Dorset had seen Dorothy that morning, and had noticed the piteous trust she was placing in the faint hope held out to her.

“I have always believed most implicitly that he is alive,” she had said for more than the hundredth time. “I feel quite sure of it. What is more, I am convinced that this man knows it, and that he is threatening Richard with exposure. That is his secret. What can we do?”

“I am doing all that is possible,” her friend had said, “but so far we have not been very successful. If we do not learn something in the next few days, I think I shall take the bull by

the horns and call upon your cousin, and tax him with knowing and concealing Reggie's whereabouts."

"But surely you do not suppose that if Richard knew Reggie was alive he would hide the fact from us?"

Lord Dorset spoke his mind once and for all.

"I'd believe anything of him," he said, with candour. "Can't you see, that if Reggie turned up again, he would forfeit the estates, and what is more, the money. I don't think he would mind the title so much, but the loss of the money would make an end of him. If there is anything in this man's story at all, then I am afraid there are sad times in front of your cousin Richard."

The next day brought no tidings of any importance. Wilkins had called upon his patron twice in one day, and had afterwards paid another visit to the Anglo-Patagonian Bank. From this they argued that he was making hay while the sun shone. On hearing this Lord Dorset telegraphed to Mr. Margetson, imploring the latter to come and see him without delay.

That afternoon the worthy lawyer put in an appearance at Berkeley Square.

"What can I do for you, my lord?" he inquired, when they were alone together.

"I want to consult you concerning the man



who called upon you with regard to what he called the Weldersham secret," said the other, and went on to explain the steps he had taken. "I wish you would give me your opinion of the matter!"

"I scarcely know what to think," the lawyer returned. "The man was certainly intoxicated when he called upon me, and, if the truth must be told, I suppose I did not pay as much attention to the hints he threw out as they deserved. The sum he asked for the information was too preposterous for words. But since his cousin, my client, is evidently paying him money, and he has continued to do so, I cannot but think that there must be some understanding between them. We both know my client is—well, to put it mildly, as——"

"As mean as any man in England, I suppose?" said Lord Dorset, with a smile. "You need not mince matters with me. Reggie was my friend, not Richard."

"Well, I think the fact that he is paying any money at all to this man points to the conclusion that the latter has information worth obtaining. What that information is we can only surmise."

Lord Dorset threw his cigar into the grate, and rose to his feet.

"Would you have any objection to accompanying me to your client's residence?" he inquired.

"I have a feeling that if we unitedly bring the matter before him, we shall achieve some notable result."

The lawyer drummed on the arms of his chair with his fingers for a few moments before he replied.

"You are of course aware that you are asking something serious of me?" he said.

"I am afraid I don't quite understand," Lord Dorset replied.

"Well, to put it plainer, you must see that if my client imagines that I am taking your side against himself, he will withdraw the business that has been in my family for nearly four generations!"

"I beg your pardon," said Lord Dorset, a little stiffly. "I had not thought of that! I suppose I have no right to ask such a sacrifice from you!"

"On the contrary," replied the old man, "let me say that I am quite prepared to run the risk. If his lordship takes umbrage at my action, he must do so. It will not be the first time he has spoken his mind to me. And" (here he paused for a moment), "if by any chance we should discover that his cousin was not drowned, as we suppose, but is still in the land of the living, I can assure you that there will be no man upon this earth more thankful than your obedient servant, Edward Margetson."

"I believe you," said Lord Dorset, taking the hand the other held out to him. "Personally I'd give half I possess to see my old friend come into his own."

"And yet?"

"Well?"

Mr. Margetson laid his hand softly on the young peer's arm.

"My lord," he said, "old men have eyes, and sometimes they have brains that think. Master Reggie, as we called him, was not in love with Mrs. Dartrell, of that I am assured."

"I know that," answered Lord Dorset. "What of it?"

"How he came to engage himself to her, I do not know. I am, however, firmly convinced of one thing!"

"And that is?"

"That in his heart of hearts he loved his cousin Dorothy!"

"I know that also!"

"Well, my lord, supposing we find him?"

"He'll marry her, and may God bless them both, say I!"

The lawyer's sharp eyes seemed to be reading the other's very soul. When he spoke again his voice was almost sad. He could read between the lines.

"God bless you, my lord," he remarked.

“All I can say is that—well, that you’re worthy to be his friend.”

“Bosh!” replied the young man. “You are getting romantic. Let us go and call upon the estimable Richard, and see what he has to say for himself.”

## CHAPTER XII

WHEN Lord Dorset and Mr. Margetson alighted from their cab at the door of Richard's residence, they were informed by his servant that his lordship was not at home.

"Have you any reason to suppose that he will return within this next hour or so?" Mr. Margetson inquired, for he acted as spokesman. "I might inform you that I am his lordship's solicitor, while the gentleman accompanying me is the Earl of Dorset."

This fact seemed to impress the man, as Mr. Margetson intended it should do.

"I don't think his lordship will be very long, sir," the servant replied. "Perhaps you would like to step in and wait for him."

"That would doubtless be the better plan," Mr. Margetson remarked.

They accordingly followed the man to the study, where they sat down, to await with what patience they could command the return of Richard.

"I'd give something to know the secret," said Lord Dorset at last. "Though, as I said an hour ago, if he is not going to tell, I don't quite see how we can force it out of him. It appears almost incredible that it can concern Reggie, and yet, if it does not, what can it be?"

As he spoke he glanced round the room. Suddenly his eyes were attracted by something bright upon the mantelpiece. Walking across the room he picked up a pair of dividers.

"What use can Richard have had for these instruments?" said his lordship to himself. Then an idea seemed to strike him, for he turned to his companion. "Look here, Margetson," he began, "Richard won't be back within the next few minutes. You are his solicitor, and it won't do for you to be mixed up in this sort of thing. Might I ask you, therefore, to go to the window, and watch what goes on in the street."

"But what are you about to do?" asked the lawyer in some alarm.

"A little amateur pilfering," the other replied. "I have found these dividers, and I want to know why he has been using them. What's more, I mean to find out. They are new ones, and work fairly stiff. After he had used them he didn't close them up, and that may, just by chance, be a point in our favour. Now go to the window, my good sir, and if you should see

your estimable client coming up the garden-path, find time to let me know, will you?"

"This is highly improper, you know, my lord," said the solicitor, but with no great warmth. "I am not sure I should countenance it."

"Aren't you? Then you'd better," chuckled his lordship. "Somehow it doesn't seem quite so bad when you reflect it is all for Reggie's sake."

The lawyer walked to the window without another word, and watched what went on in the street. Then the last representative of the noble house of Dorset entered upon his career of crime. He opened the cupboard under the bookcase, but found only a biscuit-tin, a bottle of whisky, two or three syphons of soda-water, and a few glasses.

"Nothing there," he murmured, and crossed to the bookcase on the other side of the fire-place. His luck was no better there, however. After that he passed to the large writing-table, of American manufacture, with a folding cover, which stood between the two windows. It was securely locked as he expected.

"This is the point where Providence helps them who are prepared to help themselves," he said, addressing Mr. Margetson's back. "It is fortunate that I happen to have one of these self-same desks at home."

Taking a bunch of keys from his pocket, he selected one, placed it in the lock, and gave it a turn. A moment later the desk lay open before him.

"Just as I expected," he remarked, taking a roll of paper tied with a piece of red tape. "If I am not mistaken, this will tell us all we want to know. No sign of your client, Margetson?"

"Not yet! But you had better be quick, my lord. He may be here at any moment."

While Margetson was speaking Lord Dorset had unrolled the paper to discover a chart of the Pacific Ocean. What was more remarkable was the fact that a track line was pencilled from San Francisco to Honolulu, and thence to Apia. Between the first two places named, the mileage was written, and the time a voyage from San Francisco should occupy. From Apia a series of dotted lines extended almost due east as far as the Low Archipelago, or, as it is more generally termed, the Paumotus Group. The dots ceased on reaching the island of Vakitavi. There were several pin-pricks in the chart between these two points, and taking the dividers Lord Dorset applied them to the holes in question. To his delight they fitted exactly. When he had placed the dividers where he had found them, he took his pocket-book and made a note of the island, and also of the group. After this he rolled up



the chart once more, tied it with the tape and replaced it in the desk, securely locking the same afterwards.

"If Vakitavi and Reggie are in any way connected," he said to himself, "how on earth did he manage to get down there?"

Before he could answer the question, however, Mr. Margetson had turned to inform him that Richard was entering the garden.

"It will not do to let him know that we have discovered anything," said the younger man. "We must first endeavour to find out what his game is."

A few seconds later Richard entered the room. He had let himself in with his latch-key, and he had certainly not expected to find visitors awaiting his coming. He looked suspiciously from Margetson to Lord Dorset as he bade them welcome. What had brought them was the question that was uppermost in his mind. He could not but remember that Wilkins had seen Margetson, and he also remembered that Lord Dorset had been his cousin's greatest friend. Taken in conjunction, these two facts certainly seemed ominous.

"Won't you sit down?" he said politely. "I hope you haven't been waiting long for me."

"Not more than a quarter of an hour," said

Margetson. "We have come to see you on important business."

"Indeed, and pray what is that business?" asked Richard suspiciously.

"Well, to be plain with you," Mr. Margetson continued, "it is connected with a visit that was paid to me last week by an individual who professed to have some secret connected with your family, of which he was desirous of disposing."

Richard had obtained command of himself by this time, and was quite ready for the fray.

"A rough-looking man having the appearance of a sailor?" he said. "Had he a small brown beard, and was he more than half intoxicated?"

"That is the man," said Mr. Margetson, somewhat surprised by the other's candour. "It was owing to the fact that he was under the influence of liquor that I had him turned out of the office. Since you can describe him, I suppose he has favoured you with a visit?"

"He has been making my existence a burden to me," said Richard, with a fair amount of truth. "He came to me with a cock-and-bull story concerning poor Reggie. Wanted me to believe that he was still alive, and that on the payment of a large sum he would produce him."

I should not be overstepping the bounds of truth were I to say that his two listeners stared at him in amazement. They had quite made up

their minds that if he admitted at all that he had seen Wilkins, he would inform them that it was in connection with some entirely different business. To find him admitting that it had anything to do with Reggie was almost too much for them. For a moment Lord Dorset had a higher opinion of the other man than he had ever had before.

"It does not sound a very probable story," Mr. Margetson remarked. "May I ask how he came to connect Mr. Reginald with the man he had met elsewhere?"

"It would appear that he came across him in Chicago," said Richard. "He professed to have recognized him from certain portraits he had seen in the illustrated papers. What was more, the man, whoever he was, threw out hints about having been nearly drowned in the English Channel. When quite exhausted he was picked up by an outward-bound American boat, and carried over to the States. As you may suppose, when I heard this I began to think that there might be some truth in the story. I told myself that if Reggie still lived it was my duty to find him. If he is alive, of course I have no right to the money."

Strange though it may be the two men found themselves growing suspicious once more. The speech they had just heard was not like Richard.

What was more, there was not a true ring about it.

"Had he any more proofs to offer you of the *bona fides* of his assertions?" asked Mr. Margetson.

"He brought me what he called a proof," Richard replied, rising and crossing to the writing-table. "That is to say, a photograph. You shall see it."

He opened his desk, and from a small drawer produced a photograph which he handed to the lawyer.

"As soon as I saw that," Richard continued, "I knew it was no good my going further with the case, so I rewarded the fellow for his trouble and sent him about his business. Since then I have seen nothing of him."

"This is certainly not a photograph of Mr. Reginald," said Mr. Margetson after he had examined it carefully. "The man must have thought you very credulous to have dared to bring you such a thing as this."

Richard did not answer.

"You say that you have not seen the man since?" Lord Dorset inquired.

"No, nor am I likely to do so," said Richard. "He evidently hoped to make money out of me; but having discovered that he could not do so, he has abandoned the attempt."

At that moment the hall-door bell rang violently, and Richard, whose face had suddenly undergone a change, sprang from his seat and moved quickly to the door.

"Say that I am not at home to any one," he whispered fiercely to the man outside.

A silence fell upon the room as a stentorian voice shouted—

"That be hanged for a —— yarn! I tell you he's at home. I see'd him come in, so don't you tell me any more of your lies, young man."

"Dear me, how very singular," said Mr. Margetson. "That surely is the voice of the man who called upon me at Weldersham. Pray let him come in, my lord. I should very much like to put a few questions to him."

"I would rather not see him," Richard returned. "He is a most uncouth person, and generally very much the worse for liquor."

"That doesn't matter. It may make him talk more freely," said Lord Dorset.

However anxious Richard might have been to prevent the entrance of the man they were discussing, he was not destined to be successful, for Lord Dorset had scarcely finished speaking before the door opened, and he stood before them. If the truth must be confessed, he was in a lamentable condition. He had doubtless given offence to some one earlier in the day, for

his left eye was now in mourning, and his right hand was bound up, while he himself was in a state of the most glorious inebriation.

"'Day, my lord, or not my lord, as cashe may be," he began. "Whatsh the meaning of all this? Servant said you were not at home. I knew better. Awful liar that man."

"What are you doing here, and what do you want with me?" Richard inquired, with an assumption of dignity that did not impose upon any one. "I thought I told you I would not have you calling at my house?"

"Not have me at your house?" stammered the man. "Then where will you have me? I thought we was pals—you and me together."

Without waiting for an answer, he treated his audience to a few bars of a topical ditty, illustrative of the pleasure of friendship. Mr. Margetson regarded him with evident disgust, Richard with fear, and Lord Dorset with what was almost amusement.

"I understand that you are a great traveller, Mr. Wilkins," said his lordship in a friendly tone. "It must be pleasant to know the world as you do!"

Mr. Wilkins remarked that if he did not know the — world nobody did.

"And when were you last in Chicago?" the young peer inquired.

"Never was in Chicago in my life," returned the other indignantly, and then added, "Whatsh I want with Chicago?"

"If you were never in Chicago," his lordship went on, "how did you come to meet the man you suppose to be Mr. Reginald Sandridge in that city?"

Richard made a movement as if to interrupt, but Margetson signed to him to be silent. As for Wilkins he stared at his questioner in stupid amazement. Then he turned to Richard.

"Whatsh he driving at?" he asked. "If he's playing a game on me tell him to keep his weather eye lifted. I'm as peaceable a man as ever lived upon this earth, but I won't be put upon. My name is Wilkins, and no Irish need apply." Then pointing at Mr. Margetson, he continued, "That old chap wouldn't give me the money when I wanted it, and I don't want to have no truck with him, or any on 'em."

"You mistake me, my friend," Mr. Margetson put in. "Had I known that your information was likely to prove so valuable, I might have attempted to arrange something with you."

"How do you know it's valuable?" asked Wilkins suspiciously, glancing at Richard meanwhile. "Did he tell you?"

"I understand that you met a man in Chicago

whom you imagined resembled the missing Mr. Reginald Sandridge. Is that so?"

In spite of his condition the man seemed able to appreciate the situation.

"That's it," he said, "you've struck it first time, old boy. It was in Chicago I met him. So it was. Bless my heart, now how it all comes back to me."

"I thought you said just now that you had never been in Chicago?" said Lord Dorset quietly.

"Never been in Chicago?" cried the other, as if his honour were being doubted. "I've lived there twenty years' or more. If any man can prove I haven't let him stand up to me, face to face, and we'll see who's who."

It was plainly useless to question the fellow further. He was either too much intoxicated to understand what he was saying, or he was pretending to be, in order to cover his employer's embarrassment. Finding that it was useless throwing out hints that he stood in need of refreshment, Mr. Wilkins at last decided to bid them good-bye.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll see him out," said Richard, "and then come back to you."

So saying he took Wilkins by the arm and led him into the hall. It was noticeable that he closed the door carefully after him.



"There's something wrong about this affair," Lord Dorset whispered. "That man may be drunk, but he is not so far gone as he is making out to be. He came here to see Richard, but finding us with him, had the sense to act as he has done."

"But why?"

"Look here, Mr. Margetson," Lord Dorset went on, "I am as certain now that Reggie is alive as that I am sitting in this chair. What is more, Richard knows it, and he is playing some deep game which I swear is not favourable to my old friend. But steady, here he comes."

"I must apologize for that fellow's intrusion," said Richard, as he entered the room and closed the door. "It was most unwarrantable. If he dares to behave in such a way again I shall be compelled to hand him over to the police."

"That would be the best plan to adopt," said Mr. Margetson. "And now let us return to the matter we have most at heart. If that photograph is any evidence at all, it is very certain that the man in Chicago is not your cousin. But are we quite certain that it is the photograph of the man he met?"

"I have considered that question," said Richard, "and have arrived at a decision with which I trust you will agree. I have not been feeling at all well for some time past; in fact, I

might say for the last six months. My doctor has ordered me a complete rest and change of air and scene. It is my intention, therefore, to start at once for the United States, and if possible, to see this man and to satisfy myself as to his identity."

"But that photograph is sufficient surely to show that there is no connection between them. Do you think, therefore, it is worth the trouble and expense such a journey would cause you?"

"I do not mind either," Richard returned quickly. "If my cousin is alive, it is only right that I should seek him out, and what is more, I intend to do so, come what may."

"And having exhausted Chicago and the American Continent, what do you propose doing then?"

"At present I am undecided," Richard answered. "It is possible I may cross the Pacific to Japan, or Australia, and probably, in that case, come home *via* India."

"Do you think you would be likely to find Reggie in the South Seas?" Lord Dorset inquired casually.

The look that appeared upon Richard's face told him at last he had scored a bull's-eye.

"In the South Seas?" he said, when he had recovered himself somewhat. "Why should he be there? I shall certainly not waste any time

looking for him in that part of the world. We might just as well search for him in Trafalgar Square."

There was another pause. Then Mr. Margetson asked his client when he proposed starting for Chicago.

"Almost at once," the other replied. "If the man that Wilkins saw is still there, I must find him before he has time to leave. In the meantime, Mr. Margetson, I should be glad to make an appointment with you. There are numberless matters I must arrange before I leave England."

"I am at your lordship's disposal when and where you please," the solicitor replied. "I only wish you had taken me into your confidence when this man first called upon you. I might have been of assistance to you."

"I almost wish that I had sent for you," Richard replied. "However, as I do not think there is any likelihood of his information proving correct, I should say there is not much harm done."

"I trust not," said Mr. Margetson, with conspicuous dryness. "I must admit, however, that I do not like the look of the man. That is neither here nor there, however."

"Shall I see you again before you sail?" Lord Dorset inquired.

"On that point I can say nothing definite," said Richard, with a look that said as plainly as any words, "I will take care that you do not."

When they left the house, Lord Dorset and Mr. Margetson walked for some distance in silence.

"I am more convinced than ever," said the former at last, "that Reggie is alive, and I am still more certain that Richard knows it."

"You do not believe the Chicago story then?"

"Not a word of it. If Reggie's anywhere, he's on that small island in the Paumotus Group."

"In that case what do you propose to do?"

"Find him," said the other quietly. "I'll beat Master Richard at his own game, or I'll know the reason why. There is more in this business than you or I imagine!"

"And for the present—what?"

"I am going to South Kensington. I promised Miss Maddison I would let her know the result of our interview with her cousin."

"One moment, my lord," said Mr. Margetson. "Do you think it wise to rouse hopes in her heart that you may not be able to gratify? As we both know, she was sincerely attached to her cousin."

"She was more than that," his lordship replied. "She was in love with him, and I feel

certain that he was also in love with her. But somehow, you know, things did not go right, possibly on account of that Mrs. Dartrell's intervening, as you lawyers say. Now, what do you intend to do? Are you going back to Weldersham, or are you coming with me?"

"With your permission I will accompany you," Mr. Margetson answered.

They accordingly hailed a cab, and bade the driver convey them to Mrs. Maddison's house in South Kensington. Upon their arrival there they found Dorothy eagerly awaiting their coming.

"Well," she asked, when the drawing-room door had been closed upon them, "what news have you for me?"

Lord Dorset described their interview with Richard, and the appearance of Mr. Wilkins. He confessed to the burglarious discovery of the chart and the information he had received from it.

"But if Reggie is on the island, why does he not communicate with us?" Dorothy inquired. "He has done nothing wrong, and I understand that there was sufficient money left to pay all his creditors in full?"

"And to leave him a few hundred pounds into the bargain," the lawyer put in with authority.

"Then what is to be done?" Dorothy asked.

"In the first place we must keep our eye on Richard, and in the second we must try to unravel the mystery of that island in the Pacific," said Lord Dorset.

"But how are we to do that?" inquired Dorothy. "It's such a long way off. But what makes you think that Richard is going to the South Seas?"

"The chart," Lord Dorset answered. "Besides, there was something in Richard's face when I spoke of the South Pacific that I did not like."

"But if we find Reggie, it will mean that Richard will have to give up the title and the estates. He cannot go on as he is now, can he, Mr. Margetson?"

"Of course not," the lawyer replied. "But I am very much afraid your cousin Richard will make a hard fight to retain what he now has. He will cling to his position like a limpet to a rock."

"We must find out when he intends to start," Lord Dorset remarked. "It would never do to let him steal a march upon us."

"And you will let me know what you are doing?"

"Everything," the young man answered. "I expect our visit to him to-day will have the effect of hurrying matters forward, so that I may

have to be off at a moment's notice. Now, as I have two or three matters to attend to, I will bid you *au revoir*. I may rely upon your assistance, Mr. Margetson, I suppose, should I need it?"

"You certainly may," said the old gentleman. "I do not see at present, however, in what way I can help you."

"And am I to do nothing?" Dorothy inquired.

"You will be of great service to us in the end," Lord Dorset answered:

"In what way? You don't know how I want to help."

"You can do so by giving the wanderer a welcome home."

## CHAPTER XIII

WHEN Lord Dorset and Mr. Margetson had left his house, Richard returned to the library and threw himself down in his arm-chair with the air of a man who would have you believe that he has reached the limit of human endurance.

"They are driving me to it," he muttered. "If anything comes of it they alone will be to blame. As for that brute of a Wilkins, I could wring his neck as easily as I could that of a sparrow. It was not his fault that they did not discover everything. Now what is to be done? It seems to me I'm between the devil and the deep sea."

This was the question Richard had been putting to himself for some days past, and up to that moment he had not been able to arrive at a proper solution of the problem. He reviewed the situation from every standpoint. One thing was quite certain! If it leaked out that Reggie was still alive, it would not be long before some



of his friends would bring him home; and, in that case, he, Richard, would have to surrender all that rightly belonged to the missing man, and not only that, but he would also be called upon to give a full account of his stewardship during his cousin's absence. The mere thought of such a thing was sufficient to destroy all his happiness. But he could not give it up—he would not—rather than that he would—— But he did not state what his intentions were. That evening, Mr. Wilkins again put in an appearance. He was then perfectly sober.

“Well, what do you want with me?” Richard inquired, by this time in the worst possible temper. “Are you come to make mischief again?”

“I have come to have a little talk with you,” Wilkins answered. “You’ll excuse me if I say it was a near go with them two gents this afternoon.”

“You might have ruined everything with your abominable drunkenness,” Richard replied. “I shouldn’t be at all surprised if they guessed the truth as it is.”

“Not a bit of it;” the man returned. “Don’t you fret yourself about that, my lord. I should like to know what Chicago has got to do with an island in the Pacific.”

“One thing may lead to another!”

"Lord bless your innocent heart, they'll never think of looking for him down there. Never fear, he won't come home to trouble you, yet awhile."

"How do you know that?"

"Why, in the first place, he's as soft as a month-old baby. He can't remember nothing. Besides, if you are really set upon it, there are other ways of working the job. He might never come 'ome, and then you'd be lord of all you survey, so to speak."

"Good God, man! What is it you have in your mind?" asked Richard fiercely. "What do you mean by hinting at other ways?"

"That all depends upon how you look at it," said Mr. Wilkins; "if you're afeared to do the job, then he'll come home to England and turn you out of house and home. Come now, don't you gammon me that you haven't thought of that. Why, I don't mind saying that for a goodish sum down, and another when it's over, I'd be ready to take the job myself."

Richard sat looking straight before him, with a face as white as a sheet of note-paper. What was it he was contemplating?

"Look here," said Wilkins at last, "you've got a good name, a fine position, and plenty of ready rhino. What more can a man want? Let t'other bloke come home, and you'll have to hand

over the lot. You'll have to pungle, my boy! And don't you forget that!"

Richard winced as if he had been shot.

"Shell out will be your cousin's motto," Mr. Wilkins continued. "And then you'll have to shell. Now, how will you like havin' to start the world again?"

Still Richard did not answer.

"What's more, supposin' it ever came out that you knowed all along where he was and didn't let on. You'd have that old lawyer bloke jumpin' down your throat before you knew where you was. Now look at it my way. Here's a lonely island with only a couple of white men on it. I've been thinkin' the 'ole job out this last two days. You hire a schooner and go down there, taking me with you, quite unbeknown to everybody. You find out that one of them men on the island is the man you want, but he don't recognize you, and you don't let on. While you are there that bloke has a nasty accident, falls over a cliff, breaks his neck, and is buried on the island quite as comfortable as any Christian. You hand me over the money as you agreed to pay me, and we separate in Apia or Honolulu, and never so much as set eyes on each other again. Why, it's as easy as fallin' off a log! And what's more there ain't no risks."

My God, Wilkins, you are a villain ! Would you have me murder my own flesh and blood ? ”

“ And why not ? What are you carrying on about ? Haven’t you been thinkin’ the same thing ever since I told you your cousin was alive ? You have, but you ain’t man enough to own up to it. Now what I should want for takin’ part in a job like this would be ten thousand pounds. Five thousand when we start—t’other five thousand to be paid when we bid each other a long good-bye—as the poetic books say. Are you game ? ”

There was a long silence before Richard replied.

“ No, no,” he said at last, “ I could not do it ! I could never look any fellow-man in the face after committing such a crime.”

“ Then you’d better own up that you know where the right lord is, and prepare to shell out. You wouldn’t like me to call upon one of them evenin’ papers, I suppose, and earn a ’onest poun’ by telling them all I know. That would give them something to write about. I bet it would make a stir. The headin’ would be arter this style—

‘DISCOVERY OF THE LONG-LOST HERL.

HIS COUSIN KNEW OF ’IS WHEREABOUTS, BUT  
REFUSED TO MAKE HIT KNOWN.’

You'd look well then! I fancy I can see you!"

"You dare not do it!"

"Daren't I? If you knew me, my lord, you'd own as there isn't much I don't dare do. Now, what do you think of this little idea of mine?"

"I must have time to think it over," Richard gasped, "I cannot decide at once."

"Well and good! Think it over. I'll come in to-morrow night and see what you've got to say about it. Though if I was you I should do the job like a man and have it over."

With this advice Mr. Wilkins withdrew, letting himself out of the house.

"He'll do it right enough," said that worthy to himself as he walked down the garden-path. "When it's all over I've got him for the rest of his natural. There was never a softer job. He'll not dare to open his mouth, and before six months are over I'll be Mr. Wilkins, the owner of as smart a little craft as is to be found among the islands, with a sure bank to fall back upon if things don't go as they should. It was a good day's work for me when I ran across that bloke in Honolulu."

Thus musing, Wilkins entered a convenient house of call.

Three days later, Mr. Margetson received the following brief note from Lord Dorset—

"DEAR MARGETSON,

"This note is to inform you that our friend Richard left England yesterday by the American liner for New York. Wilkins accompanied him. I am off in pursuit, and it may surprise you to learn that Mrs. and Miss Madison go with me. The latter positively refuses to be left behind, and, of course, she cannot go alone. How long we shall be away, or what will be the result of our search, I cannot say. Of one thing, however, you may be certain, if Reggie is alive, we'll find him, and bring him home in triumph.

"Believe me,

"Very truly yours,

"DORSET."

"And may it please God to let them find him," said Mr. Margetson.

## CHAPTER XIV

Who is there who has seen San Francisco who will ever forget the impression the city first made upon him? It is a city of palaces and hovels, of progressive millionaires on Nob's Hill, and the most conservative race in the world in China Town; the gateway of the islands where Civilization is in its infancy, and the terminus of one of the most mighty railway systems on the face of that, or any other continent.

Our travellers had small time, however, to comment upon these wonders. As was set forth in the previous chapter, they had started for America as soon as the news of Richard's departure had been made known to them. They had caught the next boat from Southampton and had reached New York in due course, after a particularly stormy passage. In that city they learnt that Richard and his companion had left for San Francisco a week before; and upon hearing this, without tarrying for rest, they once more set off in pursuit. On reaching the Golden City of the

West they proceeded with more caution. They had no desire that Richard should discover that he was being followed. Should he do so there was no knowing what might happen. They had first to ascertain whether he had left the city, and if so, when, by what means, and whence? In order to make these inquiries, however, it was necessary that they should themselves remain in the background. How to do it, therefore, was somewhat of a puzzle, seeing that they did not know at what hotel Richard was staying. The question had perplexed Lord Dorset more than he cared to admit. It was only when they left the railway-station, or depôt should I call it, that a solution of the difficulty occurred to him. He accordingly addressed Mrs. Maddison.

"Mrs. Maddison," he said, "I am afraid I shall have to leave you for an hour or so, while I call upon a gentleman to whom I have brought a letter of introduction. What puzzles me, however, is where you can stay while I am away. It would be more than unfortunate if we were to enter the hotel at which Richard is staying and he were to see you."

"We must risk that," Mrs. Maddison replied. "Somehow I don't think Richard is in this city."

As soon as a quiet hotel had been discovered, Lord Dorset set off to the office of Mr. J. Winter Wigram, the millionaire, to whom Sir George



Welbrooke had given him a letter of introduction. His offices proved to be in Kearney Street, and they could only be described as palatial. Having entered, Lord Dorset sent in his card to the great man, and a few seconds later was invited to step into another room, where he discovered the magnate himself.

"The Earl of Dorset, I believe," said that gentleman, rising from his chair and holding out his hand. "Won't you be seated? I am glad to meet you. Perhaps you will tell me what I can do for you?"

"I bring you a letter of introduction from my friend, Sir George Welbrooke," Lord Dorset replied. "When he heard that I was visiting the States he told me that I must make a point of seeing you."

"I am obliged to him," said the other. "If I can be of any service to you while you are in the City I shall be more than delighted. May I ask where you are staying, and how long you contemplate remaining?"

"We only arrived to-day," the other answered, "and I am afraid we must be getting on again as soon as possible. Our time is very limited."

"When you say 'we' I presume you have your countess with you?" said Mr. J. Winter Wigram.

Lord Dorset laughed.

"I am afraid that up to the present," he remarked, "there is no countess. I have, however, two ladies travelling with me. Should I be trespassing upon your time if I tell you why I am here and what I want you to do for me?"

"By no means," the millionaire answered. "Please tell me whatever you think proper."

Thus encouraged Lord Dorset set to work and told Mr. Wigram the story of the Weldersham succession, and his connection with it, bringing his narrative to a close with the information that Mrs. Maddison and her daughter were his companions, and that it was their intention, if possible, to reach the island on which Reggie was supposed to be living, before Richard could do so.

"As you admit yourself," said Mr. Wigram, when he had heard him out, "it's a delicate business. The gentleman who is at present known as the Earl of Weldersham, should have arrived here a week ago. If I am right in my conjectures, he and his companion will make their way to Apia by the mail, charter a schooner there, and proceed direct to the island of Vakitavi. Perhaps you are not aware that the Honolulu boat sailed a week ago?"

"No, I was certainly not aware of it," Lord Dorset returned. "In that case how am I to follow him?"

"If you will allow me to help I think that can be managed. But before we go any further permit me to make a proposal. I understand from what you say that your lady friends are resting at an hotel. Will you let me offer them and you the hospitality of my house? Mrs. Wigram will, I am sure, be delighted to receive you."

"You are more than good," Lord Dorset answered gratefully. "Upon my word, if you are quite sure we shall not be inconveniencing you, I shall be only too delighted to accept your invitation on behalf of the ladies and myself."

"Then it is settled," said the millionaire, and going to the telephone he placed himself in communication with his spouse. An animated conversation ensued. "The carriage will be here in half-an-hour," he said, when he left the instrument, "so we can go on to the hotel and pick up your friends, and then drive to my residence. In the meantime I will have inquiries made as to the Earl of Weldersham's movements. I understood you, I think, to say that he is travelling under the name of——"

"Sanderson," Lord Dorset replied.

Begging the other to excuse him, the millionaire left the room. It was not long before he returned.

"By the time we reach my house we should

know where he is," he said. "I have put a man on his track who will tell us all about him."

Twenty minutes later the carriage made its appearance, and the two gentlemen took their places in it. When they had picked up the ladies at the hotel where Lord Dorset had left them, they drove to the millionaire's residence on Nobs Hill, and received a warm welcome from his wife, a delightful lady with, as Dorothy remarked to her mother later, the most charming manners in all the world.

Of the kindness that was shown them during the few hours they stayed in the Golden City it is not necessary for me to speak. The crowning point, however, was reached next day when Mr. Wigram, who had been absent from home for upwards of an hour, returned and invited Lord Dorset to drive with him to the house of a friend.

"I have discovered," he said, "that Mr. Sanderson, as you call him, did not stay anywhere, but that he booked a passage for Apia on the last steamer that left, and sailed in her on the same day that he arrived here." Then he added, as it seemed, almost inconsequently, "I fancy you will like my friend Hobbkins. He is a good, whole-souled fellow, and a first-rate man of business. One of our leading men, in fact."

Mr. Hobbkins' offices proved to be even more palatial than those of Mr. Wigram. The owner was certainly in keeping with his establishment, from the top of his shiny head, to the toes of his still more shiny shoes. He was delighted to make Lord Dorset's acquaintance, he declared ; the more so as he happened to be a friend and guest of his neighbour, Mr. Wigram. He would gladly do anything in his power to make Lord Dorset's stay in their city pleasant. A bottle of Perrier-Jouet was produced, and in this admirable liquor they drank each other's healths.

"My friend Wigram," said Mr. Hobbkins, "has informed me that you are anxious to reach an island in the Paumotu Group as quickly as possible."

"I cannot do so too quickly," Lord Dorset replied, "for my own peace of mind."

"I took the liberty of telling Mr. Hobbkins something of your story, of course in confidence," Mr. Wigram put in. "I trust I did not do wrong?"

"Not at all," his lordship replied. "I am sure Mr. Hobbkins will not let the information go further."

Mr. Hobbkins gave the necessary assurance, and then proceeded to make an offer, so overwhelming in its generosity and importance that Lord Dorset was almost staggered by it. It

appeared that he, Mr. Hobbkins, was the owner of a thousand-ton yacht.

"The finest along the coast," said Mr. Wigram.

It also appeared that Mr. Hobbkins at that moment was contemplating a lengthy cruise with his wife, and what was more, that he was ready to put to sea at a moment's notice.

"I have never visited the Paumotus Group, and I should be very glad to do so," he remarked. "If you are anxious to get there quickly, why not let me make those islands my objective, and convey you thither? By sailing there direct much time would be saved, and if any good comes of it, well—I don't mind saying that I shall be the more delighted. What do you think?"

"Your offer staggers me," Lord Dorset replied. "If you really mean it, I will accept, and thank you from the bottom of my heart."

"Of course I mean it. You can arrange to start whenever you like."

That evening, in order that they might make the acquaintance of Mrs. and Miss Maddison, Mr. and Mrs. Hobbkins dined at the residence of Mr. Wigram. It was then that Mr. Hobbkins was able to inform Lord Dorset that preparations were being made so that the yacht might be ready to leave within two days.

"How can we thank you," said Dorothy, "for your kindness to us?"

"By enjoying yourself as much as possible while you are on board," answered the hospitable San Franciscan. "I think you will do that. You have no idea how beautiful the islands are!"

"I am afraid I shall think more of finding my cousin than of the beauty of the scenery," Dorothy returned, and later on Mrs. Hobbkins informed her husband that there was more in this speech than he imagined.

"The girl's in love with the missing man," she said. "I haven't the least doubt of that." And then, being a sympathetic little body, with a touch of the romantic in her nature, she pictured herself as the Hand of Providence bringing the two lovers together again.

As it transpired, however, three days were destined to elapse before the yacht could be made ready to leave. Meanwhile their impatience was increasing every hour. They pictured Richard steaming away to Honolulu, fearing lest anybody might be aware of his errand, and hoping against hope that the man he would find on the island would not prove to be his long-lost cousin.

"It is the fact that he has that villain Wilkins with him that I don't like," said Lord Dorset to Mr. Hobbkins, when they discussed the matter.

There is nothing that man would stick at if he were well paid for it. That he has the other in his power I have no doubt! Goodness alone knows what he will drive him to before he's done."

"It's not a nice business certainly," said Mr. Hobbkins. "If, however, we arrive at the island before they do we shall be able to arrange matters for them. We shall sail direct, while they will have to go round. It's a dollar to a cent that they will be detained in Apia."

"I sincerely hope they may! It would never do for them to get there before us."

"I do not think they will do that!" replied the other. "There's not a faster boat than mine between here and Vancouver. Let them search where they will."

This Lord Dorset was destined to discover very soon for himself. The *Golden Queen*, as she was called, was a magnificent craft, luxuriously found and fitted, and capable of travelling her eighteen knots an hour if necessary. What was more, she had for her captain a man who knew the Pacific as well as he did Kearney Street; and who, as soon as he heard what was wanted of him, vowed that he would land his party off the island in question almost before they knew that they had left San Francisco. Mr. and Mrs. J. Winter Wigram accompanied



them on board and bade them farewell, insisting at the same time that they should make a point of staying with them when they returned from Vakitavi.

"And let us hope," said Mrs. Wigram, "that you will bring your friend back with you."

By the time night fell the yacht had left San Francisco far behind, and the voyage to the Paumotus Group might be said to have well commenced.

The next ten days were entirely uneventful; the skies were blue, the sea calm, and in consequence the daily record of the vessel's progress was almost monotonous in its sameness. Fifteen knots by day and night was the average, and had any had any doubts on the subject they could have had their fears set at rest by an examination of the patent log which trailed from the taff-rail. Mr. and Mrs. Hobbkins proved an admirable host and hostess, and by the time they had been only a few days at sea their visitors felt as if they had known them all their lives. One evening Lord Dorset and Dorothy were standing at the bulwarks together, looking out across the sea.

"I wonder how our voyage is destined to end?" said she. "Sometimes I find it difficult to believe that it is real. It seems only the other day that we were in London, and now here



"Please God we shall find Reggie there," replied Lord Dorset.

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*A Twofold Inheritance*



we are sailing across the Pacific in search of an island, the name of which I had never even heard until a few weeks ago."

"Please God we shall find Reggie there," replied Lord Dorset fervently. "That will be the proper climax."

Dorothy was silent for a few minutes. Then turning to her companion once more, she said—

"Lord Dorset, what do you think Richard intends doing if he finds him?"

"You have asked me a question which is rather difficult to answer," replied the other. "He may only want to satisfy himself that his cousin is alive in order to hand over the money and estates to him. He certainly told Mr. Margetson and myself that he could not enjoy his present possessions if he thought he was not entitled to them."

"That sounds very nice and honourable of him," she said. "Unfortunately, however, it does not seem quite like Richard. Besides, why did he tell you that story about Chicago?"

"To put us off the scent, I suppose. I can assign no other reason to it. What disquiets me most is the fact that Wilkins is accompanying him."

"You don't know what terrible dreams I have had about that man," she answered. "They are so real that I am almost afraid to go to sleep."

But supposing when we get there, we find that we have been deceived, and that the man is not Reggie after all; what should we do then?"

"We can only hope for the best," said Lord Dorset. "For my own part I cannot think that Richard would be going to all this expense and taking all this trouble unless he were pretty sure in his mind what he was about."

The next day found them in the thick of the Paumotus Group. Verdant islands rose on every side, some large, some small, but each appearing to the eyes of the English voyagers a veritable fairyland. As the navigation was by no means easy, the yacht was slowed down to a few knots an hour. They were promised, however, that they should reach Vakitavi by daylight next morning.

In this the captain proved to be as good as his word, for surely enough next morning, when Dorothy drew aside the little curtain that covered the port-hole of her cabin, she found herself looking upon a little bay, on the further side of which was a strip of white sand and a white house, with a broad verandah above it and a densely-wooded hill behind. She dressed as quickly as she could, and, after a brief visit to her mother, she was about to ascend to the deck when Lord Dorset made his appearance in the saloon, accompanied by their host. It was evi-

dent from their faces that something serious had happened.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "I hope you have not bad news for me!"

"That depends how we take it," said Lord Dorset. "I am sorry to say there is a schooner in the lagoon, and I am also very much afraid that Richard is on board her. They have got here quicker than we expected."

"Then what is to be done?"

"We have been talking that over, and I think the best thing we can do will be to adopt Mr. Hobbkins' suggestion, which is that he should go ashore and make inquiries. He will then be able to find out all we want to know without attracting suspicion. If Reggie is there, and Mr. Hobbkins will recognize him from his photograph, he will doubtless be able to persuade him to come off to the yacht. Thus we shall spike Master Richard's guns, and give him a wholesome surprise into the bargain."

"I will go with pleasure," said Mr. Hobbkins. "I'll see about a boat at once."

With that he returned to the deck; while Dorothy and Lord Dorset ascended to the smoking-room, whence they could see all that went on, remaining themselves unseen.

They were anchored in a small lagoon, on the reef of which surf broke continually with a roar

like that of distant thunder. Three or four cables' lengths away a fair-sized schooner was lying at anchor, a thin column of smoke issuing from her galley.

As soon as the boat had been lowered and brought alongside, Mr. Hobbkins descended to her.

Before making for the shore a course was steered to the schooner, whose identity was of so much importance to them. The boat drew up alongside, and Mr. Hobbkins ascended to the deck. The following is that gentleman's account of what happened—

“I was received on board by a tall man, with a long brown beard, who did not in any way answer the description you gave me of Lord Weldersham or Wilkins. He said he was the captain of the schooner, and asked to whom the yacht from which I had come belonged. I gave him my name and address, whereupon he was good enough to say that he had heard of me. He himself, he declared, was from Samoa on a charter. At that moment a smaller man came out of the deck-house, and seemed surprised to see me. When the captain addressed him as Mr Sanderson, I realized that our suspicions were correct. That he resented the presence of my boat in the lagoon I could easily see. What was more, he endeavoured to find out what had

brought me to the island, and when I intended leaving it again. I cannot help thinking that your cousin is the possessor of an uneasy conscience. The man you call Wilkins I did not see, and I could not of course ask questions concerning him. I accordingly bade them good-bye and descended to my boat again. When I landed I made my way up to the white house you can see from here. It is a commodious affair, with the trade-room at one end, and the living-room at the other, and a broad verandah round three sides. The doors of both rooms were open, and in the latter two white men were seated at breakfast. The one nearest me had a broad, humorous face, with a small pointed beard. His companion I recognized at once. He is as like that portrait of your cousin, Miss Maddison, as a man could well be."

Dorothy gave a little gasp and sank down on a seat.

"Courage, Miss Maddison," said Lord Dorset. "Courage!"

"Standing at the door, I bade them 'good-morning!' 'Good-morning,' they replied. The man with the beard next inquired whether I came from the yacht in the lagoon. I answered in the affirmative, and gave him my name. He thereupon motioned me to a seat and inquired whether I would have some breakfast. Thinking



that this would be a good opportunity to make a few inquiries, I sat down at the table and fell to work upon some fried bananas, or *fai*, as they call it. All this time the younger man had spoken never a word. His eyes had a dreamy look that I could not understand."

"He is not ill, is he?" asked Dorothy anxiously.

"On the contrary, he looked as well as a man could possibly do. Yet his silence and that far-away look puzzled me more than I can say. At last I asked him how long he had been on the island. He informed me that he could not remember.

"My mate's had rather a bad time of it,' the other explained. 'He has lost his memory altogether. If it wasn't that I am fond of him, and that he's one of the real right sort, I'd turn him out for he causes me a lot of trouble. If he gets away into the scrub for a mile or so I've got to go out and bring him back again. He'll look after the store and take care that the niggers don't prig anything, but if you were to question him all day and all night he wouldn't be able to tell you whether he sold them rum, dynamite, or tobacco. When he first turned up here I didn't know what to make of him. That was the best part of a year ago. Since then, however, we've got to be as thick as thieves, haven't we, old man?'

“ ‘You have been very good to me,’ replied the other, in a very pleasant voice. ‘I don’t know what I should have done without you.’

“I invited them to come off to the yacht, but they said they couldn’t manage it just then, but might do so later.”

“But we can’t wait,” said Dorothy piteously. “Now that we know he is there why can’t we go ashore and fetch him?”

“I think it would be better to wait a little,” replied Mr. Hobbkins. “Besides, you have not breakfasted.”

“I must go and tell mamma,” said Dorothy. “She would never forgive me if I kept this from her. Oh, I am so thankful that we have found him. Poor—poor Reggie—how he must have suffered!”

When Mrs. Maddison and their hostess joined them they sat down to breakfast, but at least two of the party were too excited to make much of a meal. They had just finished their repast when the sound of oars reached them. Then a voice hailed the yacht.

“That’s the owner of the store,” said Mr. Hobbkins. “His name is Ainsley,” he added.

“Then he is coming,” Dorothy cried, clutching the back of her chair. Her mother linked her arm in hers, while Mr. Hobbkins and Lord Dorset ran up the companion three steps at a time.

But they were destined to be disappointed, for it was only the owner of the trading station who had come aboard.

"Why didn't you bring your friend with you?" Mr. Hobbkins inquired, almost angrily.

"Because he went out after breakfast after his usual silly fashion, and he hadn't come back when I started. I know he can't come to any harm, so I just left him. Anyway you look at it, I don't reckon he'd have been much good on board this boat. Ladies' society wouldn't be in his line."

"How do you know we have ladies on board?" asked Mr. Hobbkins in astonishment.

"Well, it looks like it, don't it?" said the trader, pointing as he spoke to some knitting lying on a seat. "I reckon you don't do knitting."

"Come below, then," said Mr. Hobbkins, "and let me introduce you to the ladies. After that we can have a chat."

He conducted the man down the ladder to the saloon, where he introduced him to Mrs. Maddison, his wife, and Dorothy. He inquired if it was the ladies' first trip among the islands, and whether they would care to see anything of the island. He would be only too pleased to show them over it.

"Before they do that," said Lord Dorset, "I

think it would be better for us to have a talk with you, Mr. Ainsley. I understand that my friend Mr. Hobbkins has not revealed to you the real reason of our visit?"

"I thought you were cruising about on pleasure," replied Mr. Ainsley. "And I wouldn't wish for a better amusement myself. It's an A1 at Lloyd's boat, this."

"But there's our business here to be considered," replied his lordship, and with that he made a sign to Dorothy, who retired to her cabin, to return a moment later with the photograph of Reggie, which had ornamented the blue drawing-room at Weldersham Castle.

She placed it on the table beside the trader.

"Sakes alive!" cried that worthy in great astonishment. "It's my mate! Well, that beats cock-fighting and no mistake. Now, how on earth did you manage to get hold of that?"

"The answer to that question would, in a large measure, account for our presence here," said the other. "And thereby hangs a tale. I understand from my friend Mr. Hobbkins that you are attached to the man whose likeness this is? Is that so?"

"If you mean being as fond of him as I would be of my own brother, then you're right. Nobody could help liking him. He is just the sort of man that any one takes to right off."

“In that case you had better hear his history. Perhaps the ladies will excuse us, if we retire to the smoking-room while I tell it to you.”

When they were seated in that comfortable cabin, his lordship set to work and told his tale. The trader's astonishment when he had heard all may be imagined. When Lord Dorset reached the point of their arrival at the island, and described their surprise at finding the schooner there already, and hinted at his fears for Reggie's safety, Mr. Ainsley could contain himself no longer. He sprang to his feet and brought his fist down with a crash upon the table.

“And here we are sitting here, smoking our cigars as comfortable as can be, when as like as not there's murder being done ashore!”

“What do you mean?” cried Lord Dorset and Mr. Hobbkins at once.

“I mean that I wouldn't have come on board this boat this morning with him loose in the scrub, if it hadn't been that two men came ashore from the schooner to shoot pigs, they said, and promised that if they found him they would bring him home.”

By this time Lord Dorset and Mr. Hobbkins were on their feet, and quite as excited as he was.

“Shoot pigs?” said the former. “They're

going to shoot him! Good heavens, what are we to do?"

"Go after him," cried the other. "And if they hurt a hair of his head—well, they had better steer clear of me. That's all I can say!"

Five minutes later the trio were on their way to the shore as fast as the boat's crew could take them.

## CHAPTER XV

To say that the occupants of the boat, which was making its way from the yacht to the shore, were excited, would not be to express their condition at all. Why had Richard and Wilkins gone ashore with rifles? Richard it was well known was not a sportsman, while to Mr. Wilkins, the exertion of following game, even pigs, would have been a far from congenial employment.

"If one hair of his head is injured, I'll shoot Richard with my own hands," said Lord Dorset. "I'll give him fair warning of that."

As for Mr. Ainsley he said nothing. But his face wore a look that told its own tale. It would certainly be a bad day for the man who should attempt to kill or injure his friend.

Once on shore they paused, as if to ascertain what Ainsley contemplated doing. That individual, however, appeared to have made up his mind. Without waste of time he led them up to the house.

"We must go after them as fast as we can lay foot to the ground," he said. "But we must find some shooting-irons first."

Having said this he went into his sitting-room to re-appear a little later with a pair of Winchester repeating-rifles. One of these he kept himself, the other he handed to Lord Dorset. Mr. Hobbkins had brought with him a small nickle-plated revolver, which threw a bullet about the size of a pea, and which would probably do as much mischief as a pea-shooter.

"Now, if they haven't found him, I think I know where we shall come across him," said Ainsley, as they made their way along the verandah, and then down the path towards the sea. "If he's left alone he generally wanders as far as the cliffs at the further side of the Island, and there he'll sit watching the sea, hour after hour, though what he finds to think about, while he's doing it, I cannot for the life of me say."

There was no need for him to bid his companions hurry. Leaving the station behind them they passed along the edge of the lagoon for some two or three hundred yards, and then began to climb the hill on the southern side. Here the jungle was very dense; indeed, in some places it was well-nigh impassable. They pushed steadily on, however, keeping their eyes and ears open for any sight or sound of the man, and men,



for whom they were searching. Once from an open patch they were permitted a glimpse of the lagoon, where they could discern the yacht and schooner riding peacefully at anchor. So far the only incidents of their march had consisted of falls and scratches. Mr. Hobbkins, in particular, found the work intensely trying. He was of somewhat fleshy build, and, as may be supposed, was in by no means the best of training. Lord Dorset and Ainsley, however, made light of the travelling. The former had often been more severely put to it when chasing the red deer in the Highlands. Having searched the hill and discovered no sign of their man there, they descended to the other side, proceeded across a narrow valley, and then commenced to climb the hill on the other side. Still there was no trace to be discovered of the men they were after—nor was there anything of the wanderer whose peregrinations had given rise to all the trouble.

“What it is that brings him to this end of the Island when he goes wandering, I cannot say,” said Ainsley. “I wouldn’t mind making a wager that I know to a yard where I shall find him. Let us hope they haven’t headed us off and gone to that particular spot.”

All this time they were pushing steadily on. On the other side of the hill they were then ascending, were the cliffs mentioned by the trader.

The native village, he informed them, was on the southern side of the island.

"You must have a lonely time of it," said Lord Dorset, who could scarcely understand how a man could endure such an existence.

"Oh, I don't know about that," Ainsley returned. "I get on well enough. It is only when the Company's schooner comes down and then goes away again that I get discontented with my lot, and then it is only for a few days. Yet, all things considered, it is a funny sort of life for a man like me. I suppose you wouldn't believe it if I were to tell you that my father was a Church of England parson in Yorkshire, and that I, myself, started my business career on a stool in a Huddersfield bank. If I'd stuck to it I suppose I should have been a cashier by this time, with a wife and family possibly, and perhaps a hundred and fifty pounds a year to keep them and myself upon. As it is, I'm a South Sea trader, cut off from all communication with his fellow-men, confining myself to trade with the niggers, and only concerned about the arrival of the firm's schooner, and the state of my copra shed."

"And you have never felt any desire to return to England?" Lord Dorset inquired.

"Well, I must confess that I used to have a bit of a hankering to see the old country again,

when I first came here," said Ainsley. "I soon got over that, however. When my mother died, ten years ago, I was pearling in the Torres Straits. Ten months or so later the old man was married again, and I didn't even know the name of his second. What's more, my brothers and sisters are all married and scattered about; so that, you see, there is not much to tempt me home now. I expect they look upon me as dead. At any rate, they wouldn't want me back, unless I was able to bring the dibs with me; so what does it matter. I'm happy enough as I am, though I don't mind saying that the news you've given me this morning has kind of shaken me up a bit. I am fond of that mate of mine, and I'm not ashamed to own it. To find out, therefore, that he's an earl, and that he'll be off to England and leave me behind, cannot help but be a bit of a shock to a man."

By this time the party had reached the top of the second hill. Once more they looked about them. Still, there was no sign either of the man whom they were so anxious to find, or of the others who, they had every reason to suppose, were following him.

In the scrub the heat was stifling. Indeed there was not sufficient air even to move the palm-fronds above their heads. Mr. Hobbkins, and even Lord Dorset felt as if they were being

slowly boiled. Ainsley, however, appeared not to notice it.

Suddenly the latter held up his hand.

"Listen," he said. "I thought I heard voices."

"They stopped, and each man listened as if his life depended upon the evidence of his ears. For a moment they could hear nothing save the hum of the insects in the trees above them, and the distant thunder of the surf upon the reef. Once more Ainsley held up his hand, and as he did so the sound of a human voice reached them from the other side of the grove.

"Drat it," it exclaimed, "how many more bloomin' times are you agoin' to tumble? D'ye want to wake the whole island? You makes as much noise as a bloomin' blacksmith's shop."

The voice belonged to Mr. Wilkins, and it was evident from the way he spoke that he was not treating his companion with the respect due to his rank.

"I cannot go any further," was Richard's plaintive reply. "I'm quite worn out."

"Then go back to the station," growled Mr. Wilkins. "To think that I should have come out with a bloomin' baby, who can't walk even five yards without tumblin' over his b—— self. You go back and leave the rest of it to me. You ain't no more good than a school-girl."

Richard doubtless felt the truth of this statement, for he replied in the humblest of humble tones that he would go back, adding that he hoped his companion would return with him and postpone what they intended doing until the following day. The language Wilkins made use of on hearing this suggestion, was not only picturesque, but also to the point.

"You can do whatever you d—— well like," he said in conclusion. "I know you now for what you are—a white-livered cur. Go back to the schooner and wish you'd never been born. As for me, I'm goin' out to find your bloomin' cousin. I'll earn my money, and you'll have to pay it, or I'll know the reason why. That's my way of doin' business, and don't you forget it."

What Richard's answer was to this they could not hear. It was plain, however, that he did not turn back as he had proposed, for Mr. Wilkins' voice was to be heard adjuring him to "pull himself together and to give up playing the baby and try to be a man."

"They're going the long way round," said Ainsley, when the sound of their voices had died down. "If he's at this end of the island, as I am sure he is, we've time to get to him before they can do so. If we don't, you can guess what the result will be!"

"I should like to put a bullet into that Wilkins," muttered Lord Dorset vindictively.

"You may be able to do that yet," said the trader. "Now let us hurry along as quickly as possible. If we're to be first we've no time to lose."

Once more they pushed ahead; this time, however, in a different direction to that which they had hitherto been following. The scrub was still as dense as ever, and the heat even greater than before. It was certainly an experience neither of them would be likely to forget for many years to come.

When they had been walking for upwards of a quarter of an hour, Ainsley, who had been leading, signed to the others to stop and look ahead. They did so, to find themselves confronted by a small open space, the further side of which was the edge of a cliff. Seated on this, with his back towards them, and with a hundred-foot drop below, was a man, dressed in a shirt and trousers, and wearing a broad-brimmed felt hat upon his head. He was gazing intently out to sea, and seemed quite oblivious to the dangerous nature of his position.

"Don't say anything," whispered the trader. "Just leave him to me. We must get him out of this before that couple arrive."

So saying he went forward into the open

ground and said something in a low voice to the man on the cliff edge. The latter turned immediately, and then Lord Dorset was able to see his face. Yes! it was Reggie after all—Reggie—his old chum; the man he loved best in the world. There could not be the least doubt about it. But, oh, how changed! His face looked twenty years older, while his hair was now grey upon the temples. Seeing that he was now out of danger of falling over the cliff, Lord Dorset ran forward to greet him.

"Reggie, my dear old man," he cried. "Thank God we've found you at last. You can't guess how happy I am. Your cousin Dorothy and her mother are on board Mr. Hobbkins' yacht, and we've come right across the world in search of you."

Reggie, however, only stared at him in a dazed way.

"I don't know you," he said. "I've never seen you before."

"But you *must* know me," cried the other. "I'm Dorset—your old friend—Dorset! Look at me, dear old man! Can't you see who I am?"

But the other still failed to recognize him.

"Dorset?" he muttered, and then shook his head. "No! I do not know you. I've never heard your name."

"Well, we've no time to discuss that 'now,'" said Ainsley. "We must get him back to the station as quick as possible. One thing is certain, we've spoilt the game of the other side. Fairly euchred them! They can't do anything now!"

"I wonder what they would have done if we had let them have their way?" Mr. Hobbkins put in

"If only for Richard's sake I should like to know," said Lord Dorset.

"If you're really keen that way we can precious soon find out," the trader remarked. "Come over here and help me to fix things. We'll sell them as they've never been sold in their lives before, only we must lose no time about it."

He led them across the open space to the thickest part of the scrub.

"Now, my lad," he said, addressing Reggie, when he had reached the place indicated, "off with your things as slippery as you can. I want them."

"What for?" the other inquired.

"Never you mind what for. Off with them!"

While Reggie was disrobing, Ainsley, assisted by Mr. Hobbkins, had been busily engaged picking a quantity of the long grass. With this they stuffed the clothes the other had thrown off, until they bore some resemblance to a human



figure. This work completed, the dummy was 'carried to the edge of the cliff and seated upon it in very much the same attitude as Reggie had displayed when they had come upon him. The soft hat, pushed well back, completely hid the tuft that did duty for a head, and indeed from a distance the effect produced was an extremely natural one. The worst and most trying part of the business had now come. This is to say, the dreary period of waiting for the others to put in an appearance. Upwards of half-an-hour went by and still there was no sign of them. During that time, however, Lord Dorset had ample time to take stock of his old friend. He could scarcely believe that it really could be Reggie who sat beside him. The other had failed to recognize him. So far as olden days went his memory was still a hopeless blank.

"Hark," whispered Mr. Hobbkins, holding up his hand. "I thought I heard a step."

They listened as if their lives depended on it, but could hear nothing. Then, with a suddenness that made them start, Ainsley sprang to his feet and stood as rigid as a statue. At the same moment the sharp crack of a rifle sounded from the other side of the clearing, and with a lurch the dummy on the edge of the cliff fell forward, and disappeared. Next moment Mr. Wilkins, rifle in hand, stepped into the opening. \*

"There you are, you cowardly cur," he cried, looking back over his shoulder. "I have done the trick for you. Come out of that, or I'll put a bullet into you too."

A moment later Richard, white as death, and trembling in every limb, emerged from the jungle.

"God help me, God help me," he wailed. "I implored you not to fire. What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?"

"Get back to the schooner as quick as you can. We must be out of this before his mate comes to hear of it!"

"Do you think he is dead?" Richard whimpered.

"You wouldn't like to be half as dead," replied the other. "I couldn't miss him at that distance. Now come on."

So saying he marched back by the way he had come, and Richard crept after him.

"What do you think of that?" said Ainsley. "For two pins I'd put a bullet through the fellow." Then turning to Reggie, he added, "You may thank your stars, my friend, that we were the first to catch sight of you. Now I must go down to the beach and get your clothes. After that we'll make tracks back to the station. If you are so minded we'll run in another little

surprise on those two beauties before they clear out."

He left them and proceeded by a way with which he was familiar to the beach, whence he returned in about ten minutes with the dummy he had so ingeniously constructed. As he pointed out to his awestruck audience, there was a bullet-hole midway between the shoulders.

It would be impossible for me to describe to you the reception bestowed upon Reggie when he reached the yacht. Mrs. Maddison and Dorothy, like the true-hearted women they were, broke down completely, while even Mrs. Hobbkins, who had never seen him before, was constrained to retire to her cabin weeping sympathetic tears. Reggie, however, on his side, remained insensible to any sort of emotion. He could not be made to understand who his friends were or why they should be so concerned about him.

Nothing so far had been told them of the scheme worked out by Wilkins and his wretched employer. Lord Dorset felt a natural delicacy in acquainting them with their cousin's villainy, while Mr. Hobbkins and Ainsley felt that if any action were taken it should not come from them. Richard, however, was not to be allowed to escape.

That evening, when darkness had fallen, Lord Dorset, accompanied by the trader and Mr. Hobbkins, left the yacht and proceeded to the schooner. Having gained the deck they passed along to the cabins. There they found Richard seated at the table, his head resting on his hands and his whole attitude indicative of complete despair. Wilkins was lolling in the bunk. On seeing the trader he inquired with an oath what he wanted?

"I have come to see you on business," said the latter. "I want to know what you have done with my mate?"

"What should I be likely to do?" asked the other.

"That's best known to yourself," Ainsley returned. "But I want to know what you were firing at on the top of the cliff?"

Wilkins denied with an oath that he had fired at anything, also that he had been on the cliff.

Richard looked as if he was about to faint. He gasped for air.

"You seem upset, Mr. Sandridge," said Hobbkins, giving him his real name.

Richard, however, was too far gone to notice it.

"There, there," said the American, "it's a pity to cause you unnecessary worry. It looks as if you have got as much as you can carry already."

With that he made a sign to some one behind him, and Lord Dorset, accompanied by Reggie, entered the cabin.

\*           \*           \*           \*           \*

There remains little more to be told. Richard, I believe, is now in South America, and I understand will never return to England. Reggie and Dorothy are the happiest married couple in the world, and are beloved by all with whom they are brought in contact. To this day Reggie is unable to say what happened on that dreadful night on which poor Stella jumped overboard. Nor does he know anything of the villainy of the man who so nearly succeeded in taking his life. Lord Dorset, I might observe, is godfather to their son and heir, and vows that he is as fond of him as if he were his own.

THE END











